

**STORYTELLING AND NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES:
INVESTIGATING THE POTENTIAL OF THE ABC'S
HEYWIRE FOR REGIONAL YOUTH**

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Abstract

This thesis takes a case study approach to examine the complexity of audience participation within the Australian public service media institution, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). New media technologies have both enabled and necessitated an increased focus on user created content and audience participation within the context of public service media (PSM) worldwide and such practices are now embedded within the remit of these institutions. Projects that engage audiences as content creators and as participants in the creation of their own stories are now prevalent within PSM; however, these projects represent spaces of struggle: a variety of institutional and personal agendas intersect in ways that can be fruitful though at other times produce profound challenges. This thesis contributes to the wider conversation on audience participation in the PSM context by examining the tensions that emerge at this intersection of agendas, and the challenges and potentials these produce for the institution as well as the individuals whose participation it invites.

The case study for this research – Heywire – represents one of the first instances of content-related participation within the ABC. Since 1998, Heywire has invited 16-22 year-old Australians who live in rural, regional and remote parts of the country to share self-representational narratives on an online platform managed by the ABC (www.abc.net.au/heywire). Taking a cultural studies approach, and through semi-structured interviews, participant observation and textual analysis, this thesis investigates the value of this project for the institution as well as for the young people who it engages as storytellers. The values of self-representation and individual self-expression are at the heart of Heywire, and yet, the PSM context produces some explicit challenges. At times, the intentions of participants intersect with the agendas of the institution in ways that are unproductive; at other times, young people's use of Heywire results in highly meaningful outcomes for the ABC, as well as the participants for whom this project functions as a unique opportunity for narrative identity and voice. Through investigating Heywire, its unproductive tensions and meaningful potentials, this research illuminates some of the exciting possibilities of PSM-facilitated participation, while also drawing attention to the missed opportunities of participatory practices in the public service media context.

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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

QUT Verified Signature

Signature:

Date: __2nd October 2015__

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Growing up on a cattle station in rural Queensland, I listened to Heywire stories broadcast on the radio every summer. Early each morning, the voice of a young person would punctuate the ABC's usual programming and open a window into a life I could relate to or empathise with. Through years of being an audience for these stories, then later a participant who shared anecdotes of her own life in rural Australia via this platform, I came to understand Heywire as a unique and possibly valuable opportunity for young people to make their voices heard and to share their experiences of life in the bush. Yet, when I became an online producer and editor for this project in 2010 it became clear to me that the way the ABC envisaged and managed the project was sometimes at odds with the way young people wanted to tell their stories. The thousands of stories hosted on the website suggested that Heywire was fulfilling a purpose in the minds of its young, rural and regional participants, and that it was providing a space in which they could represent their own lives and express their views. However, there were certain limitations imposed by the need for these stories to align with a vision for voice designed by the ABC. What this meant for the storytellers is that some narratives and voices were privileged and heard to the exclusion or silencing of others.

The initial impetus for this study was incited by the perspectives I gained as a producer, and the questions I began to ask concerning the Heywire project's usefulness for a large number of geographically dispersed young people. I wondered: what were young people achieving through telling their personal stories on a platform such as this? What did Heywire mean for them and was it useful? As a storytelling project managed by the national broadcaster that sought to "give voice" to young people who lived outside of Australia's capital cities, Heywire was fraught with tensions, but it also appeared to encompass the potential to support young, rural and regional people to be the authors of their own identities and represent the nature of their lives in a way that could be recognised by the broader Australian public. This thesis investigates these tensions and potentials.

Background

Technological developments and changing patterns of media production and consumption have created numerous challenges and opportunities for public service media (PSM) institutions. A fully digitised, convergent media environment has prompted PSM institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to move beyond their traditional role as broadcasters of media content towards a more inclusive model in which audiences are invited to participate in the creation of their own stories. Through an increased focus on audience participation and user-created content PSM can be seen to be genuinely attempting to reflect the multiplicity of voices within the societies they represent.

Projects that involve audiences in processes of media production, sharing, and meaning-making are becoming increasingly prevalent in the PSM context, and they are now a centrally important part of the broadcaster's service to the public. These institutions propose that the opportunities they provide for participation and content creation are also valuable to their audiences: people are invited to author their own identities and represent their own lives rather than suffer homogenising or degrading accounts of their lives and identities delivered by media professionals (Meadows 2003, 192). Further, public service institutions such as PSM are seen as legitimate players in the public sphere; they not only guarantee an audience for self-representations, but confer on them a legitimacy that they would not otherwise have (Thumim 2009, 632, 2012, 128).

Within the spectrum of ways PSM is fostering audience participation, a popular and effective method is to invite specific cohorts or identity groups to use digital technologies to create and share personal stories that reflect that identity. Self-representational narratives are solicited and curated through various projects and distributed via multiple broadcast platforms that are managed by the PSM. Such projects are of great significance to the facilitating institutions, representing a way through which PSM institutions can be seen to be orienting themselves within a shifting media landscape and continuing to provide a service to the public (Thumim and Chouliaraki 2010, 84; Thumim 2009, 621).

Despite these possibilities and the increasing prevalence of personal stories and other forms of user-created content in the PSM context, audience participation is complex and in many ways problematic. Projects sustained by participation by audiences have emerged in the context of shifting priorities within PSM and out of struggles to reinvent the

role of these institutions in the contemporary media sphere (Thumim 2009, 620-621). Such projects develop and are managed in ways that prioritise the outcomes of audience participation for the PSM institution, and they are sustained only to the extent that they serve the institution's purposes. The involvement of audiences must therefore occur in ways that align with institutional conventions and fulfil the objectives of PSM. The challenge for PSM institutions is to manage and sustain participatory projects in ways that are valuable to the institution, and also meaningful to its audiences. This thesis investigates:

- **The organisational structure of a PSM institution such as the ABC and its capacity to incorporate personal narratives, questioning:**
- **In what ways do the agendas of the institution and the participants intersect to create a genuine platform for participation?**
- **How do participants repurpose PSM-managed platforms in unexpected ways, to produce various outcomes for themselves as well as the institution?**

In the case of the ABC's Heywire project, it is clear that fruitful outcomes are produced by the young people who share stories. Unproductive tensions, on the other hand, are often an outcome of the illusion of participation created by the institution and its failure to encourage its audiences to engage in processes of content creation, storytelling and meaning-making on their own terms, without institutional interference. The aim of this research has been to illuminate some of these challenges and to consider the future direction of PSM's practices around participation and life narrative.

Context

This thesis examines the complexity of audience participation within the context of public service media, and the ways in which tensions emerge between the institution and the members of the public whose participation it seeks to foster and sustain. As a project embedded within an Australian PSM institution, the ABC, the Heywire project clearly represents the shifts that have occurred within these media institutions and the challenges and opportunities that have accompanied them.

The contemporary focus on user-created content within professional media institutions suggests a number of positive developments for audiences. Through engaging

with members of the public as content-creators rather than merely as audiences, PSM appears to be blurring the boundaries between media producers and consumers (Hutchinson 2012). In this way these institutions are, to some extent, redressing traditional hierarchies of power within the mainstream media; as Nico Carpentier et al. suggest, PSM is contributing to a “democratic revolution” in the media (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 288). By involving members of the audience in processes of content creation and self-representational storytelling, these institutions are expanding the range of voices that may contribute to the public sphere. I do not intend to diminish the value of an increased number of voices for more nuanced, more meaningful representations of society; however, the mere presence of the voices of ‘the public’ within PSM does not necessarily equalise the traditional distribution of power between media producers and consumers, nor equate to the democratisation of the mainstream media. The voices of the public are only invited and emerge on the terms of the institution.

Established in 1998, the Heywire project is one of the longest-running initiatives in which the ABC involves members of its public in the creation of media content. In part, this thesis traces Heywire’s evolution over the years and examines the ways the ABC has deployed particular technologies, sought to innovate, and sustain Heywire as a relevant and useful project amid technological change. This case study provides a means through which to examine two broad issues that are at the centre of audience participation: the challenge for PSM to maintain the integrity of the institution within a project that depends on user-created content; and the usefulness of projects such as these for the participants. These two issues, from which a subset of other more complex challenges stems, form the tension that is at the heart of the Heywire project. Investigating this tension prompts questions of value: to what extent can a project such as Heywire be useful to the PSM institution as well as its participants?

Methodology and research process

Increasingly, practices of meaning-making, identity, and self-expression are entwined with new media technologies or entirely played out in mediated environments such as social media and the internet, and within professional media institutions. Inherently concerned with questions of voice, power, identity and representation, cultural studies has unsurprisingly become invested in the use and social implications of new media

technologies. In these contexts, cultural studies as a lens considers the ways in which new media and the internet are implicated in the shaping of norms, worldviews and individual or collective identities while also providing avenues through which these can be challenged, subverted or redefined (Fornäs et al. 2002, 24). Amid hopes that new technologies and an increased focus on user-created content will widen access to the means of self-representation and self-expression, cultural studies investigates

the mundane stories behind people's approaches to media, to counter the celebratory rhetoric that often inflects broad-scale histories of cultural change. Cultural studies provides a way to find these counter-histories, to make theoretical appraisals more inclusive and reflective of reality (Gregg 2004, 369).

In the context of public service media, user-created content is a valued and now commonplace form of participation that seems to promise more equal power relations between media professionals and their audiences, and increased opportunities for amplifying unheard voices. For these reasons, cultural studies is an important intervention: fundamentally concerned with hierarchies of power (Couldry 2000, 2), it investigates the extent to which opportunities to 'participate' in the media reconfigure traditional structures of voice and representation. It is a task that recognises content such as personal stories are embedded within complex, "tangled webs of relations" (Rodman 2014, 55) involving the participants and the PSM institution, its obligations and protocols, and it addresses the ways these enable, limit and shape self-representation and voice, as well as the way people experience their participation.

The case study Heywire allows for a contextualised and in-depth exploration of these complexities. This thesis analyses Heywire holistically, and from multiple perspectives, considering how the project is purposed, managed and sustained by the PSM institution, as well as how it is understood and experienced by the cohort who it involves as participants. The strength of a case study approach for examining the nature of audience participation within PSM is that it enables an investigation of the complexities in question within the "real-life context" in which they originate, and at the micro level (Zainal 2007, 2). Robert Yin's definition of case study further emphasises its value for this thesis: according to Yin, case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon "when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Zainal 2007, 2). The phenomenon of interest here – the complexities of audience participation within PSM – cannot be separated from its context. As Jonathan Hutchinson notes, "[t]he current context of the PSM is one that includes audience participation" (Hutchinson 2013, 28).

Projects that invite participation evidently exist because of the contemporary focusses and orientation of the institutions that created them. Case study research enables an examination and analysis of how and why such projects function within the PSM context in which they are created, and from the perspective of the numerous actors involved (Tellis 1997, 2).

Such an approach is a suitable one for cultural studies research. The attention to the specificity and the in-depth analysis afforded by case studies accords with Melissa Gregg's (2004) argument for the usefulness of "speaking and studying the mundane" in cultural studies. Gregg argues that "abstract assumptions to do with an aspiring collectivity" are insufficient for effectively accounting for the way people experience a phenomenon (Gregg 2004, 368). As in cultural studies, case study research remains attuned to context and "to the individuating local intensities" (Morris in Gregg 2004, 368), therefore providing the means to examine the precise ways a phenomenon such as audience participation operates, and to reveal how it is or is not useful to the people involved. Such an approach attends to "singularity" and "this-ness" (Gregg 2004, 368) and produces knowledge that is context-dependent, though not disconnected from other experiences or unrelated to other contexts.

For instance, through a close and multi-perspectival analysis of the case study Heywire, this thesis contributes to a body of work that looks in-depth at how PSM-managed projects that are sustained by audience participation are experienced by the people who facilitate these projects, as well as those who participate. While much scholarship acknowledges that digital technologies and audience participation are now a fundamental part of the public service remit, there is as yet significantly less literature that investigates how participatory projects function, their inherent challenges and potential value (exceptions include Hutchinson 2013; Dwyer 2014). An even smaller amount of scholarship addresses what these opportunities for self-representation and self-expression mean for the people PSM engages as participants. This thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap.

The Heywire project was selected as the case study for this thesis because of its longevity within the ABC. It represents one of the ABC's first forays into "content-related participation" (Carpentier 2009, 2003), and it is the longest-running of a growing number of initiatives in which this broadcaster endeavours to foster participatory processes. Heywire is an ABC Radio project and a nation-wide storytelling competition for 16-22 year olds who live in rural and regional parts of Australia. The ABC invites young people who live in non-

metropolitan areas to contribute short, personal narratives about their lives to the Heywire website (see figure 1), in which they describe what life in rural, regional or remote Australia is like for them, and express their views on subjects that are important to them. Young people use a variety of media to create their stories, including video, photographs, audio and text based narratives.



Figure 1: Heywire website homepage, 2015.
<http://abc.net.au/heywire>

Every year, one story from each of the ABC Local Radio regional stations is chosen as a winning entry then professionally produced as a radio feature and broadcast throughout rural and regional Australia. Between 35 and 40 winners are selected each year and these storytellers receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Canberra for the ‘Heywire Regional Youth Summit’, during which they develop proposals for creating positive change in rural and regional areas, and pitch these to federal ministers and members of parliament (Heywire 2014c). Dan Hirst, Executive Producer for Heywire since 2010, describes the project as “a platform for the stories and ideas of young people of rural, remote and regional Australia”, the aim of which is to “give voice” to this group both on the ABC and within Parliament House (interview, October 2012). As a case study, the Heywire project provides a means through which to explore the opportunities and challenges of audience participation, both for the project’s facilitators and the PSM institution, as well as for the youth who share personal narratives via this platform.

To explore the complexity of participation in Heywire and the variety of ways the agendas of ABC staff and project facilitators intersect with those of the youth participants, this thesis analyses the project as comprising three distinct levels. Heywire is a platform for sharing life stories; it is a storytelling competition; and it is a politically-focussed Regional Youth Summit. Each level produces a separate set of tensions and raises different questions about the opportunities and limitations of storytelling and participation in the PSM context. The three levels depicted below are discussed in depth in chapter three.

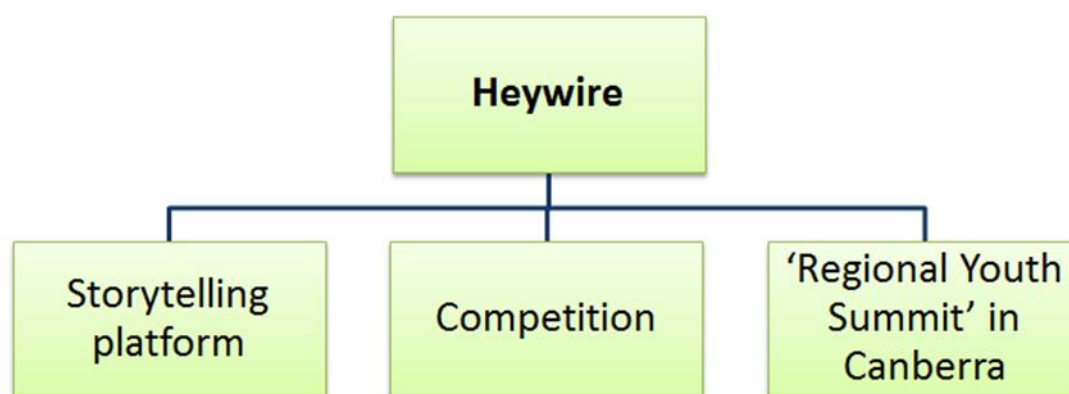


Figure 2: Three levels of Heywire.

As a PSM initiative that is sustained by youth participation, that has sought to be a “safe space” for young people’s online self-representation and self-expression (Sadov 2009, 3), and endeavoured to ‘give voice’ to a minority group through inviting them to share personal narratives, Heywire represents the intersecting of three core themes: public

service media, life narrative, and youth and new media. Within the current PSM context, in which participatory approaches to content-creation and self-representations via digital technologies are commonplace, Heywire presents as an interesting study: the project has evolved significantly in the 18 years since it was initiated and it therefore provides specific insights into how a PSM institution has sought to reorient itself in a changed media landscape and endeavoured to meet the needs of its “newly empowered audiences” (Spigelman 2013, 14). In its effort to sustain Heywire as a useful and relevant project, the ABC has aligned it with other platforms that have a high degree of youth participation, such as YouTube and social media, and sought to replicate the functions of these popular platforms within Heywire. Despite these attempts to reposition Heywire, this project is unlike other media that young people frequently use for self-representation. The project’s differences from other media are a source of tension but are in other ways advantageous. They are also representative of some of the difficulties Australian PSM has faced as it has endeavoured to adapt to the media practices of its contemporary audiences.

The principles and values of cultural studies prompt detailed, qualitative empirical research, as well as engagement with broader theory (Couldry 2000, 14). This thesis uses a variety of methods often combined in cultural studies research: participant observation; semi-structured interviews; and textual analysis (ibid, 67). It examines Heywire’s position and purpose within the ABC through organisational research, observation and analysis of the project’s storytelling platform, interviews with the ABC staff members who facilitate the project as well as with rural and regional young people who have participated, and textual analysis of the personal narratives that participants have contributed to the project’s website.

Drawing from Christine Hine’s observation that “the internet can be seen as a tool, place, and way of being” (in Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009, 9), the Heywire website was observed and analysed as a ‘place’ and ‘tool’ for the creation and sharing of personal stories; a ‘platform’ positioned within the ABC and subject to the obligations and objectives of that organisation; and it was investigated as a form of “participation in the media” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 10). I visited the Heywire website several times a week, reading, viewing and listening to the personal narratives participants shared, familiarising myself with the architecture of this platform, and with the ‘About Heywire’ information provided by the ABC. This research process highlighted competing agendas between the project and its participants as a core issue to be investigated in this thesis.

While many qualitative internet researchers engage in the field and culture of interest through participating in the online environment in the same way as their research subjects, ‘hanging out’ and building rapport (boyd in Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009, 29), I observed, analysed and questioned invisibly, from the periphery. One reason for this is that the Heywire website is not a communicative space that enables dialogue or interactions between participants. Rather, it is a platform that invites young people between the ages of 16 and 22, who live outside of Australia’s capital cities, to contribute stories about their lives. The architecture of the site simply did not enable me to participate alongside my research subjects by sharing stories, or to interact or communicate with them. Furthermore, as a 27 year-old now living and working in the city, I do not belong to the identity group that the Heywire project seeks to engage. While I have participated as a storyteller in the past, to do so for the purpose of this study would have been an intrusion, and it would not have added anything to this research.

Ongoing observation and textual analysis of the Heywire website provided insights to the storytelling practices of its users, the types of stories shared, institutional structures, and social, political and cultural conditions that shape participation on this platform. Arguably, textual analysis is never only the study of a discrete, isolated unit but rather an investigation of the context in which texts are produced, circulated and negotiated (Couldry 2000, 76, 80). This is a particularly relevant point for analyses of internet texts such as the Heywire website. New, digital technologies and online environments such as Heywire’s storytelling platform bring into sharp relief the idea that cultures are no longer discrete, coherently bounded units comprising collected peoples (Couldry 2000, 98; boyd in Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009, 27). Hence, this study was never bound entirely to the Heywire website. Rather, it was important to investigate the interconnections and overlapping contexts that have shaped the aims and structure of the Heywire website and influenced regional young people’s participation in this space.

I explored the broader world of ABC Online to understand Heywire’s position within this institution and its connections with other participatory projects, and I analysed various ABC policy documents, annual reports and the Corporation’s Charter. This research was contextually valuable, providing insights into the objectives, purposes, obligations and governance of the ABC. Furthermore, it demonstrated ways in which the ABC has changed over the years, how the organisation sees its position in the current media environment, and its increased prioritisation of using digital technologies to engage its many audiences. Taking the research beyond the immediately apparent boundaries of the Heywire website

provided alternate views of the Heywire project, including the way it is framed and positioned within the ABC, and how its purposes and value is understood at the level of the institution. For instance, it became clear that Heywire maintains a specific space within the ABC. Although the ABC now has numerous projects and platforms that rely on audience participation, Heywire's persistent focus on life storytelling and voice as opposed to other forms of content render it unique from newer participatory projects. Other of the ABC's participatory projects – such as ABC Pool and ABC Open – will be discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Discussing the complexity of qualitative internet research, danah boyd points out the limitations of constructing field sites based on architectural features or notions of “community” which (foolishly) assume that the website or network of interest is a continuous cultural environment (in Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009, 27-28). Individuals bring different sets of assumptions to any particular site and these shape their expectations and practices. This was noticeable on the Heywire website where the variety of stories shared revealed different intentions for participating in this project (for example, educating others; activist purposes; confessional storytelling). It was clear that online observations would only ever provide a limited view of Heywire. To “try to balance the view”, as boyd encourages, I approached the project from other angles, employing different methods (in Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009, 28). I conducted semi-structured interviews with ABC staff who are currently involved in the project, as well as with eight rural and regional youth participants in order to gain an understanding of the Heywire project from multiple perspectives.

The approach taken to the interviews, both with ABC staff and with youth, was inspired in part by the interests and techniques of oral history. As a research technique, oral history aims to include previously overlooked lives and experiences, incorporating the voices of individuals on the periphery of society (Janesick 2010, 4; Anderson et al. 2004, 224). Kathryn Anderson et al. suggest that when people speak for themselves, “they reveal hidden realities: new experiences and new perspectives emerge that challenge the “truths” of official accounts and cast doubt upon established theories” (Anderson et al. 2004, 224). The purpose of the interviews conducted for this thesis was to develop a thorough understanding of the underlying complexities of audience participation; that is, under what conditions does a participatory project emerge within PSM, and how do the staff members involved understand its purpose and value?

While academic scholarship and media professionals both proclaim that participation is a core, contemporary value for PSM institutions, interviews provide insights into how participation is managed, experienced and valued by the people involved, and hence on a more personal level. Similarly, the interviews with the rural and regional Heywire participants aimed to investigate claims made by PSM institutions, and in academia, that the move to invite user-created content has the potential to lead to more equal power relations between media professionals and their audiences, and supports people to share their own stories, in their own voices.

These interviews did not aim to be holistic; rather, they were designed to elicit narratives that detailed the participant's experiences (Miller and Crabtree 2004, 191) – either as a facilitator of the Heywire project, or as a storyteller who had shared a self-representational narrative via this platform. The interviews were organised loosely around a series of open-ended research questions; the aim was to lead a conversation in which the participant's conceptions of and personal intentions for the Heywire project could emerge.

While the interviews revealed project participants' personal accounts of their involvement, textual analysis of a number of Heywire stories provided insights to the type of storytelling and self-representations that this project makes possible. Heywire, as a platform with precise conventions and affordances, enables a particular kind of narrative self-representation to emerge. For example, Heywire is a project for rural and regional youth and not urban youth, and it is a platform for autobiographical and life stories as opposed to fiction, poetry or experimental narratives. These are not necessarily shortcomings, only evidence that Heywire facilitates a very specific kind of participation and fosters a different kind of self-expression and identity construction than those young people may articulate on other platforms. Textual analysis usefully enables these narratives to be examined in the context in which they are produced and shared. As Couldry argues, the value of textual analysis is its investigation of a "wider textual environment" comprising the conditions under which a text is produced and circulated (2000, 80-83). He explains "we cannot assume as our starting point 'the text'"; rather, if our analysis is to reveal anything about wider social or cultural conditions it must take into account the complexity of the environment that led to the production of meanings (Couldry 2000, 71).

Helen Thornham and Angela McFarlane (2014) make a similar point with reference to understanding user-created content within a youth participation project facilitated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). They emphasise that the content youth created

for the BBC Blast project “should not be interpreted as a final isolated product, but should be seen as embedded in a complex process” (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 197). Similarly, rural and regional young people’s Heywire stories are embedded within, and emerge in the context of, institutional protocols, the agendas of project facilitators and the personal intentions of the participants. Performing a textual analysis on a number of Heywire stories offered a means through which to explore the sorts of narrative self-representations that could emerge in such a context, and to theorise the potential value of these for the participants.

In addition to aiding an understanding of Heywire, its conventions and affordances, textual analysis of participants’ stories fulfilled two other useful functions: it helped reveal the project’s distinct role within the broader media environment in which it endeavours to fit; and it offered a method with which to explore the ways in which young, rural and regional youth “make sense of who they are, and of how they fit in the world in which they live” (McKee 2003, 1). Since young people use a variety of new media and online platforms to represent their lives and express their views, textual analysis – as an investigation of a “wider textual environment” (Couldry 2000, 76) – helps bring into focus Heywire’s place and role within an ecology of media. As a platform for personal narrative, Heywire’s precise affordances centre on meaning-making, identity-making practices, making textual analysis an obvious and effective approach for exploring the nature of these meanings and how they are constituted. Such a methodology highlights the inherent characteristics of Heywire stories: they are sites in which rural and regional young people have made meaning of their experiences and crafted their identities. Textual analysis treats the stories as material traces or evidence of how people have made sense of the world (McKee 2003, 15).

As a project that facilitates participation through inviting young, rural and regional people to share personal stories, the case study Heywire is an example of some of the precise tensions involved in inviting self-representational storytelling in the PSM context. Heywire stories demonstrate a coming together of participants’ personal intentions for their stories, and the overarching objectives and affordances of the Heywire project. Textual analysis revealed that, at times, these tensions were problematic and potentially destructive. For instance, the broader objectives of the Heywire project sometimes clashed with the authorial intentions of the youth participants. It was clear that while the ABC hopes that the Heywire project will provide youth with a platform for self-expression, and on which to represent themselves in an unmediated, authentic way, the broadcaster privileges positive narrative self-representations, stories that follow a narrative arc, have

explicit meaning and closure. It also needs for participants' narratives to meet a certain standard of quality. As a PSM-managed project, participation in Heywire must occur in a way that fulfils the objectives of the institution.

The need to fulfil institutional objectives produces numerous challenges for Heywire; for instance, these impact upon its potential to be useful to the large number of participants who use it as a storytelling platform. Yet, the precise ways in which Heywire enables and guides young people's participation can produce fruitful outcomes. Analysis of the stories revealed instances where the personal aims of the storytellers appeared complementary to the objectives that underpin Heywire. For these participants, the precise ways in which Heywire shaped and guided their participation, and the nature of their narratives as enabled by and embedded within the context of this project resulted in the expression and representation of a narrative identity that fulfilled a unique, personal purpose. This case study hence demonstrates the potential for participants to repurpose the affordances of a PSM-managed project to find their own meanings and create self-representations on a platform outside of mainstream social media.

Chapter overview

Each chapter of this thesis investigates Heywire on a different level and addresses a specific aspect of the research questions in order to progressively reveal the complexities and possibilities of the project. The next chapter, chapter two, situates this study within core debates and concerns around public service media and participation, digital storytelling, and youth and new media. As a PSM project that seeks to engage rural and regional youth as storytellers and provide an online platform for young people's self-expression and self-representation, Heywire represents the interconnecting of these three core fields. This chapter firstly traces the digital reinvention of the ABC and highlights some of the tensions around PSM's contemporary focus on audience participation. The explicit focus on user-created content and participatory practices within PSM can in part be attributed to digital storytelling and the changed culture of media production and consumption this movement represents.

The second section of chapter two aligns Heywire loosely with digital storytelling since this project to a large extent mirrors the principles upon which this practice was founded. By historicising Heywire as broadly part of the digital storytelling 'movement', the

unique value of facilitated storytelling as a means for self-representation and self-expression is highlighted. The discussion of digital storytelling illuminates a complex interaction between voice or self-expression and ‘listening’, or ‘being heard’. Digital storytelling initiatives and projects such as Heywire seem proficient in facilitating voice and supporting marginalised individuals to ‘speak up’; yet, ‘speaking’ and listening rarely occur in unison, and enabling voices to be acknowledged by others is both a challenge and limitation of these projects. Lastly, through engaging with current discussions around youth and new media, this chapter outlines some of the difficulties the ABC has faced as it has endeavoured to position Heywire within a broader ecology of media and sustain the project’s relevancy in a dynamic media landscape.

Chapter three is an in-depth investigation of the case study Heywire. This chapter relies on interview and observational data as well as organisational analysis to describe the project’s position and purpose within the ABC. It outlines the numerous institutional agendas which underpin Heywire and explores the roles and aspirations of the ABC staff members who facilitate the project. By documenting Heywire’s managerial and funding structures and outlining the aims and objectives of the project’s various stakeholders, this chapter makes explicit the tensions inherent in the project’s structure and considers the challenges these produce for youth participants who share stories on this platform.

Having investigated Heywire at its institutional and managerial levels and revealed the perspectives of the project’s facilitators, the next chapter investigates Heywire from the point of view of its participants. Chapter four is based heavily on interview data and discusses young people’s experiences of Heywire, including their intentions for participating in the project, the personal outcomes that came of their participation, and the patterns of their experiences. Semi-structured interviews with eight of Heywire’s youth participants produced valuable insights into how the project is understood by young people, the degree of their satisfaction with the project, as well as their uncertainties. These interviews revealed a surprising diversity of expectations, intentions and experiences of Heywire, and unexpected insights into the various ways young people’s participation is mediated, enabled and also constrained within this project. While the interviews revealed experiences of Heywire that were mostly very positive, rural and regional young people’s accounts of their participation supported this thesis’s argument that Heywire is a project and platform of competing agendas.

Chapter five's textual analysis of a number of Heywire stories demonstrates explicitly the ways in which multiple agendas produce challenges within the project, but can also result in fruitful outcomes. Through analysing a selection of Heywire stories, the capacity for this platform to be a meaningful space for identity construction and sense-making is investigated. Chapter five applies narrative theory to explore some of the unique affordances of storytelling projects for supporting individuals to author their own identities and express their voices, and to theorise the extent to which these affordances may be realised in Heywire. The analysis of Heywire stories reveals the unique value of a platform for narrative, and yet the nature of this project as PSM-managed can clearly be seen to produce challenges. For example, while Heywire effectively facilitates self-expression, its privileging of positive narrative self-representations and 'good stories' demonstrate a limited capacity to listen to the voices it engages. Hence, on one hand, Heywire can be viewed as worthwhile because the storytelling it facilitates reveal experiences, identities and ways of understanding the world that are not enabled by or visible in other types of media; however, the need for the project to meet explicit objectives and overarching institutional agendas means the personal intentions of the participants are often overlooked and undermined, impacting upon the project's usefulness to the youth cohort it seeks to engage.

This thesis shows that the contemporary focus on audience participation and personal stories within PSM pose challenges for these institutions and also for the participants they engage as storytellers. The investigation of Heywire facilitates a critique of the formalised, rigid model of audience participation in the public service media context, and prompts questions over the usefulness of such practices for PSM, as well as participants. Through an exploration of the ways in which rural and regional youth use and experience Heywire, this research illuminates possibilities and the potential value of opportunities for self-representation within PSM. However, this study also reveals that the highly prescriptive nature of Heywire is a limitation for acknowledging and amplifying a diversity of voices and life stories. As such, while audience participation and practices of self-representation and self-expression within PSM encompass some positive potentials, these exist in tandem with multiple, often significant shortcomings that can offset the usefulness of such practices.

Chapter 2: Contemporary discussions and debates

This chapter situates this study within three main fields and the debates and discussions that accompany these. As a PSM initiative that is sustained by youth participation, that has sought to be a 'safe space' for young people's online self-representation and self-expression, and endeavoured to 'give voice' to a minority group through inviting them to share personal narratives, Heywire represents the intersection of public service media, digital storytelling, and youth and new media. By situating Heywire at the juncture of these three fields this chapter addresses the first part of the research question. It investigates: what capacity is there for meaningful participation in the PSM context, and what are the potentials and limitations of personal narrative and digital technologies to incorporate audience self-expression and self-representation?

Firstly, this chapter introduces Australia's PSM institution the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the recent shift towards audience participation within PSM worldwide. Heywire reflects this shift as well as some of the challenges produced by an increased focus on participatory processes. The narrative focus and aim to facilitate voice through storytelling reveals Heywire as in part born out of digital storytelling and the principles upon which this practice was founded. Subsequently, the second part of this chapter situates this study within the wealth of research that addresses the digital storytelling 'movement'. Lastly, this chapter positions this research within the contentious field of youth and new media – a shifting landscape of theorising about young people's interactions with new media technologies – in which Heywire occupies an interesting space.

Public Service Media

On July 1st 1932, Australia's national public broadcaster, the ABC, aired its first programs. The ABC was from its inception closely modelled on the BBC and the Reithian tradition that 'to inform, to educate, and to entertain' is the core objective of public service broadcasters. Unlike its predecessor the BBC, however, the ABC has "always shared the air waves with commercial competitors" and has thus never had the media dominance that the BBC has had (Inglis 2006, 11). Further, the ABC has not had its own licence fee since 1948 and is instead funded by the Australian Government through an annual budget (Inglis 1983, 186-

187; Spigelman 2013, 14). Under its legislation the ABC is required to provide an independent and balanced national broadcasting service ("Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983" 2013, 6). As outlined in the ABC Act of 1983, the functions of the Corporation are: to provide innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard that contribute to a sense of national identity; that inform, entertain, educate, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian people, and also encourage awareness of Australia internationally. Further, the ABC will provide digital media services and encourage and promote the arts in Australia ("Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983" 2013, 5 - 6).

The ABC's funding structure is an inhibiting feature for the broadcaster, since its programming and the breadth of its services are unavoidably defined by the annual appropriation provided by the Australian Government. As Chairman of the ABC James Spigelman describes,

the scope of the ABC's activity inevitably has been subject to the oscillation of the political pendulum, to and from a preoccupation with market failure and government failure, generally reflected in funding levels rather than direct restrictions (Spigelman 2013, 14).

The ABC's editorial processes and decisions are independent of the Government; as the ABC itself specifies, "[i]ndependence from all vested interests, particularly those of the Government of the day, is a central characteristic of effective public broadcasters around the world" (in Flew 2012, 18). However, its capacity to provide innovative, comprehensive broadcast services and fulfil other of its Charter obligations is inevitably dependent on the annual budget it is provided through the Government. Such can be seen in the way services are created or abandoned based on the annual budget cycle. In 2014, for example, retraction in ABC funding resulted in the axing of programs such as the Australia Network, the ABC's international television service ("Australia Network" 2014). While the requirement that the ABC will broadcast to international audiences is written in its Charter, it is evident that fulfilling such an obligation is a difficult function for the broadcaster whose budget can alter with a change of Government, and whose programming is shaped by Government priorities.

As of 2015, the ABC's services include 13 radio networks¹; six television channels²; ABC Online, which provides web components of most ABC divisions and broadcast programs; additional services including platforms for public debate; educational resources such as ABC Splash; and specialist websites like ABC Health & Wellbeing, Disability, Environment and Arts. Heywire comes under the ABC Radio division, and a link to the Heywire website can be found on the ABC Radio homepage.

The Heywire project is in many ways an interesting counterpoint to other ABC projects and programs. While numerous ABC initiatives are created, cut, or altered as a direct result of Government decisions and budget cycles, Heywire has continued to operate since 1998 as a rural youth storytelling project and competition. While it has evolved over the years to keep abreast of technological advances and changing patterns of media consumption, the objectives that underpin Heywire along with the project's fundamental structure have largely remained the same. This can partially be attributed to the fact Heywire was born as a collaboration between the ABC and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) (<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/>) – a statutory authority established by the Australian Government – and it is jointly funded by the ABC and a number of Federal Government departments that have a vested interest in non-metropolitan communities. This funding structure will be described in detail in chapter three. Heywire's existence has as such never been wholly dependent on, or shaped by, the ABC; rather, it is partnered with several Government departments and the financial support it receives from these is unrelated to that provided the rest of the ABC. These aspects of Heywire appear to grant it some immunity throughout budget retractions and cuts to the ABC's programming. Irrespective of Australia's political environment, Government budgeting priorities and the ways these affect the ABC, Heywire has continued to secure funding and function as a youth storytelling project and competition year after year.

The project's survival can also be in part attributed to the fact it matches several of the broadcaster's contemporary priorities. For instance, the ABC is increasingly prioritising its online and digital media services, and inviting user-generated content. Heywire's use of

¹ ABC Local Radio (comprising 9 metropolitan and 51 regional stations), triple j, ABC Radio National, ABC Classic FM, ABC NewsRadio, Radio Australia, ABC digital radio (comprising 4 specialist channels: Grandstand, Jazz, Extra, Country, Double J, and triple j Unearthed), and ABC Open.

² ABC 1, ABC 2, ABC 3, ABC News 24, iView, and ABC 4 Kids.

the internet and its provision of an online platform on which young people can share multi-media narratives are therefore significant. These features mean it embodies some of the ABC's current priorities around audience involvement, and it is one of a suite of initiatives in which the broadcaster invites contributions from the public.

The ABC's digital reinvention

In 1995, the ABC extended its capacity for audience involvement through the establishment of ABC Online, a move that marked a significant development in the ABC's relationship with its audiences. While the ABC had an already-established history of audience participation – such as through radio talkback which became increasingly popular from the 1960s onwards (Martin 2002, 46) – ABC Online offered new possibilities for the broadcaster to engage with and involve the public. According to Fiona Martin, ABC Online was set up “as an experimental expansion of the ABC's broadcast presence”, intended to secure new audiences for the corporation, and “to allow the ABC to “interact” with its public” (Martin 2002, 48). The ABC's web service thus provided the potential for the broadcaster to reconfigure its traditional relationship with the audience as merely ‘listeners’ or ‘viewers’ and instead engage with them as ‘users’ and ‘citizens’ (ibid). ABC Online now comprises an extensive suite of services. The Corporation's web presence, along with its continued focus on developing mobile capabilities, smartphone apps, and its use of social media to enhance the delivery of its services are examples of ways the ABC is responding to changing trends in media consumption, and demonstrate it is attuned to the current media era of user-created content.

Many researchers have discussed ways in which technological developments and changed audience practices have created new challenges for public service broadcasters (PSBs) around the world and prompted these institutions to redefine their purpose and relevance (see for example Wilson, Hutchinson and Shea 2010; Enli 2008; Hills and Michalis 2000). Audience participation is now a key strategy in public service broadcasting, and becoming increasingly important to how these institutions define their role and usefulness to the public. Gunn Sara Enli (2008) and Nancy Thumim with Lilie Chouliaraki (2010) all argue that audience participation is a strategy for institutional legitimacy; that is, a way through which PSBs are seeking to demonstrate their relevance as institutions that provide the public with a service, and simultaneously demonstrate that the public are of central importance to the institution (Thumim and Chouliaraki 2010, 86-87).

PSB's adoption of technologies to engage with participatory cultures and foster new forms of audience engagement (Hutchinson 2012) mean that participation, involvement and interaction are becoming a more and more central part of the public service remit. As Martin suggests, "[t]o the common PSB mantra of 'inform, educate and entertain' we might now add involve and connect" (2002, 57). Similarly, Enli argues that "public service broadcasting in the digital era may best be described as 'entertainment, education, and participation'" (2008, 105). Australia's Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy has also suggested that the contemporary role of PSBs should be to use digital technologies in order to engage the audience in new ways (Hutchinson 2012).

In a fully digitised media environment, where people are representing their lives, accessing news, and expressing their opinions via numerous digital platforms, PSBs have come to occupy a unique space. Evidently, engaging the public through involving them in the creation and sharing of media content is an important move for PSBs to remain relevant and interesting to their audiences, and also a key way in which these organisations have evolved to suit contemporary media practices. Importantly, though, an increased focus on audience participation is not only indicative of how PSBs are keeping pace of technological developments and meeting the needs of changed audiences, but an area in which PSBs are fulfilling a unique function.

The possibilities for involvement and participation that organisations such as the ABC are creating differ extensively from sorts of participation in and through the media (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 288) that can be seen to be occurring on Twitter and via social media, on personal blogs, or on platforms such as YouTube. Public service institutions such as PSBs are seen as legitimate players in the public sphere, and therefore the opportunity to participate – such as through creating and sharing content or through contributing one's opinion – within the institution is offered as a highly legitimate form of participation. Such is clear in the case of Heywire, which the ABC suggests is valuable opportunity and platform for young people's storytelling, precisely because it is managed by the ABC. As Heywire's online producer Jonathan Atkins explained to me, sharing stories and expressing ideas via Heywire is different from articulating them via social networking sites: "It isn't like posting a rant to Facebook or Twitter; Heywire is an ABC platform that guarantees an audience" (Atkins, interview, November 2012). Heywire stories 'get noticed' as legitimate accounts. As Thumim suggests, legitimacy is a two-way street: audience involvement is a strategy for institutional legitimacy, and legitimacy is also a key part of

what the public gains through their participation within the institution (Thumim 2012, 128, 2009, 632-633).

A changing media landscape, and the changes this has meant for the role and function of institutions such as the ABC means there has been “a semantic shift” from the concept of the ABC as a public service broadcaster (PSB), to that of a public service media (PSM) institution as it embraces the affordances of new technologies to engage in content creation activities with its audiences (Hutchinson 2012; Mackay and Heck 2013, 97). Terry Flew et al. (2008) assert that, in the digital media environment of the 21st century,

it is better to understand the ABC and SBS [Australia’s other national public broadcaster] as public service media organizations, rather than public service broadcasters. This emphasises how it is the services provided, rather than the delivery platforms, that are at the core of rationales for public support of the ABC and SBS (Flew et al. 2008, 2).

The ABC has embraced such ideas through an increasing number of initiatives and projects that enable its audiences to interact with, share, and create content. A previously one-way, one-to-many mode of broadcasting has thus been reconfigured into a more dialogic broadcaster-audience relationship.

The ABC is keenly aware of the need to adapt and be increasingly innovative in the current media environment and cites this as a challenge for the Corporation. For example, in 2013, the ABC’s Chairman stated:

In the current media environment, the challenge is for the ABC to ensure that it stays at the forefront of innovation in delivery to online platforms. As with all other media organisations, we are creating – out of necessity – new forms of engagement with newly empowered audiences for whom content creation has become a two-way flow (Spigelman 2013, 14).

More recently, at a forum at the Queensland University of Technology on August 15th 2014, the ABC’s managing director Mark Scott said the ABC is continually adapting and innovating to meet the needs and expectations of “an increasingly mobile, lean-forward audience who watch and listen to their media content on smart phones and tablets, rather than TVs and radio; who want to interact with that content, to share it, and also to participate in its creation” (McNair 2014).

To be an innovative media organisation is one of the ABC’s Charter obligations, and to be experimental is expected of the national public broadcaster (Hutchinson and Bruns 2013; Hutchinson 2013, 8). Of particular interest here is how the broadcaster is required to

develop new, innovative models of audience involvement and to experiment with audience participation. The ways the ABC has adopted new technologies in order to diversify its services and establish unique new forms of audience involvement mean it is leading in technological innovation in Australia. Stuart Cunningham notes “the public broadcasters – especially the ABC – have been at the forefront of creative uses of, and citizen engagement with, the affordances of the internet and especially social media” (Cunningham 2011, 19).

The ABC was one of the first media institutions in the world to have an online presence (Burns in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 329) and “ABC Online has been at the forefront of internet platform development in Australia” (Hawkins 2010, 289). Further, the ABC has been the first Australian broadcaster to incorporate user-generated content into its editorial policies (Cunningham 2011, 19). As a number of researchers have argued, the ABC offers opportunities for audience participation that far exceed those offered through commercial media (Hutchinson and Bruns 2013; Burns in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 329). Maureen Burns suggests that its capacity to experiment, and thus lead the way in technological innovation, is one key difference between the ABC and its commercial competitors (in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 329). Furthermore, the ABC’s experimentation with new modes of audience involvement, and its engagement with participatory cultures are central to how it fulfils its innovation role (Hutchinson 2013, 289).

The ABC has an ever-increasing number of projects and platforms that invite people to contribute media content in the form of photographs, videos and personal stories for distribution across numerous broadcast platforms. Amongst these are ABC Open, ABC3 RAWR, the now concluded ABC Pool, and Heywire. Initiated in 1998, Heywire was one of the first initiatives in which the ABC asked members of the public to create and share their own content. However, as will be discussed throughout this thesis, Heywire is in many ways quite different from other of the ABC’s participatory projects. One aspect of difference is that from its inception Heywire has been closely tied to the agendas of the Australian Federal Government, has been partially Government funded, and has a clear political imperative. Although the project has changed over the years, its links with the Government remain central to its structure, and these are a key part of the ABC’s concept of Heywire’s use and usefulness to its target cohort.

A regional focus

The launch of Heywire in 1998 can be attributed to the nature of Australia's political environment in the late 1990s, and the ways this affected the national broadcaster. Heywire was one of several new regionally-focused ABC initiatives that emerged during this time, suggesting the involvement of the Coalition's National Party (Griffen-Foley in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 145). Under a Coalition Government, the ABC's budget was cut significantly between 1996 and 1998 which resulted in narrowing the scope of the Corporation's role. The 1996 Mansfield Review into the role and functions of the national broadcaster suggested a number of ways the ABC could reduce its costs in response to the reduction of its funding. Bob Mansfield declared that "The core business of the ABC should be domestic free-to-air broadcasting" (Inglis 2006, 396). As such, reductions were made to metropolitan and international radio services in favour of an increased focus on the regions (Inglis 2006, 388-389). Mansfield also recommended some adjustments to the ABC's Charter. As Ken Inglis describes:

He inserted responsibilities not specified in the original which he believed to be of widespread concern now: to provide locally based news, to reflect regional (as well as, in the original, cultural) diversity, to meet the needs of children and youth (Inglis 2006, 398).

These revisions were never officially incorporated into the ABC Charter (ibid); however, these suggestions are likely to have influenced the ABC's decision making and programming in the late 1990s. With its explicit focus on rural and regional youth, one could surmise that the creation of Heywire was one the ways the ABC incorporated Mansfield's suggestions and responded to the requirements of the Government at the time.

Heywire emerged within, and has survived throughout some tumultuous times for Australia's national broadcaster. Reductions in funding, staff, along with the 'crisis of legitimisation' that Reithian-modelled broadcasters have faced in a media environment characterised by audience fragmentation (Hutchinson 2012) and user-created content have clearly produced major challenges for the ABC. As the national public broadcaster, the ABC has a conscious commitment to provide broadcast services to minority audiences, and to cater for groups neglected by commercial media organisations (Harrington in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 182; Spigelman 2013, 20). Traditionally, rural, regional and remote Australians and youth have been the minority or 'special populations' the ABC has sought to serve (Hawkins 2010, 291).

Through Heywire, the ABC can be seen to be addressing two of its target groups simultaneously and providing programming that is distinctly tailored to them. Such is

important for the ABC in meeting its Charter obligations and fulfilling its public service remit. Heywire represents an important tool through which the ABC – and through it the Australian Federal Government – can be seen to be providing a service for rural people, and for youth. The ABC is legislatively required to reflect and represent regional diversity ("The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's commitment to reflecting and representing regional diversity" 2013, 15; ABC 2013b, 2000), provide rural and regional Australians with "a vehicle for discussion and debate" in addition to "avenues through which regional views and perspectives can be represented to wider audiences" (ABC 2000, 3). The Heywire project is an integral part of these commitments. In the ABC's 2013 submission to a Senate inquiry on the national broadcaster's commitment to reflecting and representing regional diversity, the ABC acknowledged its responsibilities and the expectations of its audiences in this area (ABC 2013, 1), and stated that they provide "a range of programs and services that reflect regional Australia and meet the needs of rural and regional communities in a variety of ways" (ibid, 3). They identify the Heywire project as an initiative which "underscores the ABC's commitment to all facets of regional and rural Australia" (ABC 2013b, 8).

Heywire's longevity can be attributed to its enduring importance for three main groups: the ABC; the ABC Local Radio listeners in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia; and rural and regional youth. The project has an established reputation in rural, regional and remote Australia. It is likely that for the ABC Radio listeners who tune in to the winning Heywire stories that are broadcast each summer, Heywire represents what it claims to: it is the voice of rural and regional youth and a platform for stories from young people who live outside of Australia's big cities. Heywire stories are engaging, heartfelt, often humorous, and as such make for entertaining radio. Further, they provide the listener with insight into the lives of young people all around the country, from their own perspectives, and in their own voices. The Heywire website boasts that over 9,000 stories have been entered into the Heywire competition since 1998, and 562 people have been named competition winners (Heywire 2015a). The fact Heywire receives hundreds of story entries each year suggests it is appealing and in some ways useful to its target cohort. As this thesis will continue to interrogate, however, participatory projects such as Heywire are likely of greater significance for the facilitating institution than they are for participants.

Participation

The central aim for Heywire is, as it has always been, to facilitate voice amongst rural and regional young people by providing this group with an opportunity to share their own self-representational narratives with the Australian public via the ABC. The project invites youth to create personal stories using their choice of media, articulate their views, and represent their own lives under the auspices of the national broadcaster; Heywire's functionality is as such dependent on young people's participation. The opportunity to participate, through sharing self-representational narratives, is also a key part of the service the project intends to offer its target cohort. Participatory approaches to content creation, in which 'the audience' is invited to create and share their own viewpoints, stories, and media, are no longer unique in the context of PSM, and the ABC has a number of projects which involve audiences in production processes, and that enable its publics to engage and interact with broadcast content. Heywire was one of the ABC's first forays into "content-related participation" (Carpentier 2003, 2009), and it is the longest-running of its growing suite of initiatives that endeavour to foster participatory processes. It is also representative of the tensions that are produced within such projects.

Conversations about participation and 'participatory cultures' are inherently about distributions of power. The concept of participation, as distinct from interaction, is a process "where the actors involved in decision-making processes are positioned towards each other through power relationships that are (to an extent) egalitarian" (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 288). Henry Jenkins and Nico Carpentier distinguish between different levels or intensities of participation, offering a definition of 'full participation' "as the equal power position of all actors in a decision-making process" (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 3). These authors demonstrate different, though not uncomplementary approaches to the concept of participation, agreeing that 'full' or complete participation can only ever be temporary and unstable, and yet it "functions as an important democratic utopia" and an ideal to strive toward (ibid). For Carpentier, "a participatory democratic culture is strengthened when we manage to construct more equal power relations in a variety of societal fields, ranging from the family to the media" (in Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 7). In the context of the media, questions of participation have to do with whether media institutions or audiences have ownership and control, and to what degree (De Kosnik in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1454).

In Heywire, the ABC appears to enable only a limited form of participation. While Heywire's aims, and the project's functionality as a youth storytelling, story-sharing initiative appear to render it an instance where power relations between the institution and the project participants are more balanced, a number of features inherent in Heywire's structure limit the degree of ownership and agency that young people may have. Rural and regional youth are involved in the project as storytellers and content creators, yet their participation is constrained by the project's organisational structure, and by its nature as a storytelling competition. The ABC, along with the Government departments that are partnered with Heywire, has specific objectives for the project which define and delimit the ways in which young people can participate, and the intensity of this participation. For instance, there are certain parameters around the sorts of stories that may be shared through Heywire, and the website is clearly defined as a space for a specific style of storytelling. Furthermore, decisions about which stories win the competition and are broadcast on ABC Radio are determined by the ABC. As such, in Heywire the ABC maintains control, ownership, and holds a degree of power that is significantly greater than that held by the project participants.

Heywire strives to facilitate young people's participation on two main levels: it encourages rural and regional youth to contribute their voices to discussions on issues that affect them and thus participate in meaning-making processes; and it invites young people to create and share their own stories on an ABC platform, hence facilitating their participation in the creation of media content. These two levels correspond with Carpentier's differentiation between two interrelated forms of participation that are conflated in the concept of media participation: participation *through* the media, and participation *in* the media (in Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 10; Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 288). The former pertains to the ways in which people can use media to enter into a variety of public spaces, public discussions and debates (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 10). Participation *in* the media, on the other hand, relates to participation in the creation of media content, as well as in decision-making processes that occur within media organisations (ibid).

The now widespread move by public service media institutions to involve audiences as content producers, and facilitate their self-representation and voice, are examples of participation *in* the media. By inviting non-media professionals to create, or be involved in the creation and circulation of media content, these institutions can be seen to be ceding a degree of power to their audiences and subsequently 'widening access to the means of

cultural production’ (Jenkins in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1451). This is one of the ways institutions such as the ABC are engaging with, and fostering the development of, participatory cultures. However, as can be seen in the case of Heywire, incorporating audience participation into processes of content production and circulation is challenging for the broadcaster, and the audience’s participation is often quite minimal.

There are some well-documented case studies from Australia as well as the United Kingdom which demonstrate that public service media institutions’ efforts to develop audience participation have been significant in establishing something closer to power equilibrium between media professionals and their audiences. According to Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali, participatory structures developed in public service broadcasting have had enormous significance in establishing more democratic input in media decision-making (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 291). The BBC’s Video Nation project (1992-2011) and the ABC’s Pool (2003-2013) are two examples where broadcasters can be seen to be involving the public in processes of content creation, and supporting self-representation and creative expression to a higher degree than is usual in the context of the mainstream media. Scholarship on these two cases indicates that the Video Nation and ABC Pool projects are evidence of PSM’s success in supporting audience participation. They are examples of the opportunities and benefits of such practices, as well as the inherent tensions produced through incorporating participatory practices in the PSM context.

Heywire bears some semblance to Video Nation and ABC Pool. For instance, in all three projects the broadcaster invites members of its audience to be involved in the production of content within the organisation. However, Heywire is an interesting contrast to both these projects: while the now concluded Video Nation and ABC Pool projects focussed on a collaborative, participatory approach to the creation of media content (Wilson, Hutchinson and Shea 2010, 23; Carpentier 2003, 427), Heywire was not initiated with the explicit aims of audience involvement and user-created content. Rather, it is based on other intentions and it is as such structurally different from these other projects.

ABC Pool

ABC Pool was an experiment into user participation at the ABC (Hutchinson and Bruns 2013), that aimed to “bring together ABC professionals and audiences in an open-ended process of participation, co-creation and collaboration” (Wilson, Hutchinson and Shea 2010,

23). Jonathan Hutchinson, community manager of ABC Pool and whose PhD thesis offers an ethnography of this project, describes Pool as an institutional online community and an ABC-managed space that facilitated collaborative and co-creative media production between ABC staff and audiences (Hutchinson 2013, 14, 2012). This project provided an online platform that invited ABC Pool members to contribute photographs, audio, video and textual media, to interact with and remix this media, “engage in conversations with other users, contribute media to themed projects, and have access to the expertise of ABC staff” (Hutchinson 2013, 2, 2012). According to Hutchinson, in Pool the ABC effectively broadened the level of engagement between ABC staff and audiences, thus increasing the value of the PSM for the public it serves (Hutchinson 2012).

Incorporating participatory cultures in processes of content production within the ABC produced some explicit challenges. For instance, the PSM institution must “maintain its societal significance as a trusted and authoritative figure while incorporating the input from the public it serves” (Hutchinson 2013, 1); however, initiatives such as ABC Pool are an important part of the ABC’s public value, and a vital way through which PSM both fulfils and extends its public service remit. Hutchinson argues that “[o]ne way the ABC is fulfilling its distinctive innovation role is by experimenting in participatory cultures”, as in projects such as Pool (Hutchinson 2013, 289). Furthermore, the co-creative, collaborative model of production pursued in ABC Pool blurred the boundaries between media producer and media consumer (Hutchinson 2012). Pool reconfigured ‘audiences’ as ‘users’, thus demonstrating a shift in how the ABC understood its relationship with its publics, as well as shifting the value of the PSM for its audiences (ibid).

There are a number of profound differences between ABC Pool and Heywire. Most strikingly, these projects were created for different reasons and are structurally dissimilar. Founded on the intention to experiment with collaborative online creative production (Wilson, Hutchinson and Shea 2010, 23), ideas of participation, partnership and collaboration between media professionals and members of the public were central to ABC Pool. Heywire, however, was never based on such principles. Although Heywire’s functionality is dependent on youth involvement and user-created content, in the form of contributing life stories to the Heywire website, this project was born out of quite a different set of agendas.

The idea for Heywire was formed by the ABC in collaboration with RIRDC in the late 1990s when the ABC was prioritising its regional services. The aims upon which Heywire

was created included providing rural and regional young people with an opportunity to communicate their opinions to a large audience and articulate issues that are of concern to them (McKenzie and James 2003, vii), and to be a vehicle for youth voice (Heywire 2011). Unlike ABC Pool and other, newer projects that are emerging within the ABC that invite user-created content, Heywire was not initiated in order for the ABC to demonstrate participatory practices; rather, it was created in order for the ABC to demonstrate that it was providing a service to youth who lived in non-metropolitan areas, and it to this day remains an integral way through which the broadcaster demonstrates its commitment to rural and regional Australia (see for example ABC 2013b, 8). Heywire was hence never structured in a way that would support youth to enter easily into collaborative processes of meaning-making and content production; it is a competition, and due to its partnership with the Federal Government, it needs to fulfil a suite of specific aims and agendas. As a result, features central to the structure of the Heywire project appear uncondusive to fostering or sustaining a very high degree of youth participation.

Heywire's persistent focus on life narrative, as opposed to any other form of user-generated content is a crucial point of differentiation between this project and the ABC's other, younger audience participation endeavours. In part, Heywire can be understood as part of the PSM's widespread move to engage its audiences in new ways and incorporate user-created content; however, its invitation to rural and regional young people to share stories about their everyday lives renders it fundamentally different from projects such as ABC Pool. The success of ABC Pool was in the project's ability to help push the ABC into the participatory media landscape and reconfigure audiences as users through involving them as co-creators of media content. Heywire, by contrast, invites personal narratives for the explicit purpose of facilitating rural and regional young people's self-representation and voice. This project's uniqueness and its potential value therefore rest in its capacity to 'capture' and amplify voices that are "flattened or silenced" (Ewick and Silbey 1995) in traditional forms of broadcast media.

Unlike newer projects at the ABC which engage the audience as content producers, such as ABC Pool, ABC Open and ABC3 RAWR, Heywire was not established on the premise that the ABC need to be content innovators or utilise digital technologies to engage their audiences in new ways. While ABC Pool was regarded as a "stellar example" of PSM innovation (Hutchinson and Bruns 2013), the Heywire project is not an example of an innovative platform for multimedia narrative, and its aim has not been to experiment with technology nor display original or new approaches to facilitating audience engagement

through digital media. While being innovative is one of the functions of the ABC outlined in its Charter ("Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983" 2013, 5), and being experimental is expected of public service media (Hutchinson and Bruns 2013), technological innovation is not a priority for Heywire. As an ABC Radio project that invites life stories from rural and regional youth and endeavours to provide this group with a voice in the ABC, Heywire continues to occupy a unique space within the national broadcaster. While it has needed to adapt and keep pace in an era of significant technological change, as well as shifts in the role and function of PSM institutions, it has not needed to innovate in order to maintain its relevance.

Video Nation

Similar to Heywire, Video Nation was guided by the principles of self-representation and the aim "to reflect everyday life across the UK in all its rich diversity" (Carpentier 2003, 428). As Carpentier summarises, "[t]he basic concept was to provide camcorders to a semi-representative selection of 'the audience', to train these (approximately) 50 people and ask them to film fragments of their daily life" (ibid, 427). The short films were screened on television and, from 2001, online as well. Carpentier describes the content produced in this project as originating "from a partnership between the production team and participants whereby the latter are granted more control over the production process and outcome than is common practice in the mainstream media system" (Carpentier 2003, 432). The boundaries between the media professionals and the non-professionals, or the 'ordinary people' who participated never became invisible, but the project nevertheless managed to grant a high degree of ownership and control to the participants (Carpentier 2003, 442-443). Subsequently, Carpentier argues that the project is a valuable model of audience participation within the mainstream media (ibid).

It is important to note some of the differences between Video Nation (VN) and Heywire, since these impact upon the 'intensity' or degree of participation that is possible within these projects. It is significant that VN was initiated in the early 1990s, that the BBC provided a select group of participants with camcorders, facilitated training in how to use them, and requested participants to send their footage to the BBC every fortnight, where it was then edited by media professionals (Carpentier 2003, 431, 439). The digital tools, the internet, and the sorts of software that enable participation in and through the media (whether this participation is minimal or high) to be widespread practices today, were not

as accessible when VN began. The BBC's assistance was therefore required during all phases of the project, from the participants' initial filming of their short videos, to the editing and distribution of content.

This differs from the ABC's approach to Heywire. When Heywire began in 1998 the ABC invited youth to send their short narratives into the ABC as written pieces or audio recordings, and ABC staff then produced a select number of these into short radio segments that were then performed on-air. Now, the ABC asks youth to contribute their stories via the Heywire website, using their choice of media. Stories selected as winners of the annual Heywire competition are professionally produced by the ABC, and ABC staff manage this process. In both VN and Heywire, therefore, the broadcaster controls the output and takes the lead role in editorial process. Due to the availability of technologies now, however, the ABC has less involvement during other phases of the Heywire project. The majority of young people who contribute stories to Heywire do so in their own time, and the content, style, and media of the story is of their own choice.

Considering the VN project retrospectively, it is clear that the ideal of 'full participation' and the fostering of more equal power relationships remained a long way off in this project. Similar to Heywire, Video Nation depended on the involvement of members of the public who participated by creating self-representational videos for the BBC. However, creating power equilibrium between the organisation and the project participants was complicated by a number of factors. As an ABC project, Heywire faces similar challenges and constraints to those incurred in Video Nation.

In both Heywire and Video Nation, the 'intensity' of participation, or the degree of control exercised by participants is necessarily constrained by the nature of these projects as initiated and managed by media institutions. Carpentier states that Video Nation is an exemplary model of content-related participation within the mainstream media (2003, 443); however, he concedes that the project could never establish the level of participation that might be created in some community media (ibid). While VN was successful in establishing something of a power equilibrium between the BBC staff who facilitated the project, and the members of the public who participated (Carpentier 2003, 443), the degree of control ceded the participants was unavoidably limited due to the BBC's need for the project to meet certain requirements and fulfil the aims of the institution.

Such can also be seen in Heywire, where the objectives of both the ABC and the Federal Government impact upon the style of, and degree of, participation that youth may

have in this project. For example, Heywire's aims to facilitate self-representation and voice through inviting youth to share personal stories about their lives exist alongside the seemingly contradictory efforts by ABC staff to orchestrate and manage the way in which storytelling and self-representation occur within this project (Carpentier 2003, 426-427). As in Video Nation, the style and concept of the Heywire project were designed by the institution. While Heywire has ideals of participation and individual expression at its heart, such ideals are unavoidably constrained by the broadcaster's need for the actions of participants to fit its concept of what the project can and should be.

In Heywire, the ABC invite young people to "open a window into their lives" (Hirst, interview, 2012; Heywire 2013b) and share the stories that are important to them. Despite the apparent broadness of this invitation, though, the ABC hopes that inviting young people to share self-representational stories on the Heywire website will prompt them to identify issues that are universal to young people who live in non-metropolitan Australia. While the project is represented as an opportunity for youth participation, there are implicit and explicit expectations and boundaries that shape, enable and limit how storytelling occurs within this project. Carpentier discusses similar constraints in Video Nation in terms of the way power was balanced between the BBC staff managing the project and the project participants. While participants had "some really good concrete power" (Carpentier 2003, 438), the BBC maintained a higher degree of control over the project's structure and execution. For example, in Video Nation the BBC selected participants who would represent the diversity of 'everyday life' in the UK. While Heywire invites story contributions from all rural and regional people who fit within the prescribed age bracket, ABC staff select a certain number of stories as 'winning entries' that are then professionally edited and broadcast on ABC Radio. As will be described further in chapter five, young people are involved in editing processes; however, as in Video Nation, the broadcaster controls this process in order to ensure Heywire stories are of a certain length and meet a certain level of quality for broadcast. Despite the Heywire project's intentions to provide young people with a platform for self-representation and voice – seemingly on their own terms – numerous structures influence, enable, shape and delimit their participation.

Participatory platforms: affordances and constraints

The style of the Heywire website, and the implicit and explicit objectives of the ABC make a particular usage of the site possible, and encourage the telling of stories that follow a

narrative arc and have a positive tone or message. Both the style and degree of young people's participation is therefore shaped by the affordances of the platform, and by the interests of the managing organisation. Discussing participation on online platforms, Jessica Clark et al. (2014) question how to examine the extent to which sociality, communication and creativity are guided, shaped or controlled in specific online contexts. Platforms have precise affordances which both guide and constrain practice to varying degrees (Gillespie in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1447). It is therefore essential to avoid regarding platforms – and likewise the organisations that manage them – as all-powerful, entirely benevolent, or merely instrumental. Yet, it is equally important to avoid seeing platform users as powerless or exploited, or as benefitting consumers (van Dijck in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1449).

In the case of Heywire, young people's participation – in the form of storytelling – is shaped by a number of factors, such as the ABC's descriptions of Heywire's function and purpose, and the webpages of "tips for producing a fantastic Heywire story" that are designed to assist young people to think of story ideas. The 'tips' page reveals explicit requirements – for instance, Heywire stories must be true, personal narratives – and a number of other expectations that are not mandatory, but are obviously preferred. For example, included in the list of 'tips' is the suggestion young people tell stories that respond to questions such as "What's a challenge you've overcome? ... What are you passionate about? What makes you or your town unique? Why do you like living where you do?" (Heywire 2014a). Such suggestions no doubt coerce young people's storytelling by encouraging the sharing of narratives that have an uplifting tone. The ABC's aim that Heywire stories will bring to light broader issues or concerns associated with youth and rural living, or that these narratives will reveal the storyteller as a motivated young person who has the capacity to 'make a difference' are also made clear on the website. The project's slogan "Heywire is... young regional Australians telling it like it is and making a difference" reveals its change-making imperative, as does the frequent usage of words such as 'ideas' and 'issues' on the website. That Heywire stories draw attention to youth issues and regional issues is an important part of Heywire's aim, and demonstrates the project's relevance to the Government departments that provide funding.

The ABC, and the Heywire website, evidently play a strong role in shaping participation – both the style of this participation, and the degree to which it is experienced by youth. However, while Heywire appears to coerce young people's storytelling in various ways, the project's rural and regional storytellers are not "utterly choreographed

participants” (Papacharissi in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1452). Such can be seen in the way young people use the website to share stories that do not fit the ABC’s visions for what Heywire narratives should sound like or do. Rather, young people tell stories that fulfil their own intentions as authors. At times, these intentions align with those of the ABC, and at other times, they are in opposition to them. Chapter five will discuss these ideas further through an in-depth analysis of Heywire stories.

Considering the ways in which participation is shaped by the affordances of platforms and the intentions of the facilitating institution importantly draws attention to broader tensions and complexities that emerge when organisations invite people to create and share their own media content within the space of the institution. User-generated content is frequently interpreted as evidence of engagement, participation, and autonomous self-expression and self-representation (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 193). Such can be seen in Heywire, which the ABC celebrates as “the voice of regional youth” and an opportunity for young people to “tell it like it is” and represent their own lives, identities, ideas and opinions. However, individual agency is not necessarily evidenced through the practice of creating and uploading content (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 194). While Heywire stories are personal and self-representative, they are constructions created within a framework of affordances and intentions which both enable and limit what they can be (Thumim 2009, 632).

Helen Thornham and Angela McFarlane (2014) make a similar point with reference to BBC Blast (2004-2010), which was one of the BBC’s experiments in user-generated content that invited teenagers to create and share their own music, photographs, and a variety of other media content on the Blast website. Thornham and McFarlane are deeply critical of the celebratory rhetoric that often accompanies user-generated content, warning that interpreting this content as evidence of young people’s creative autonomy and individual self-expression misdirects attention from the larger systems and structures in which the content is embedded (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 194). Using the example of the BBC, they point out that in the digital age where the broadcaster is increasingly making space for user-created content, questions of how we should value this content, and what it is evidence of, are increasingly significant (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 198). Importantly, they assert that “a blanket approach to online content as always indicative of participation/creativity is misguided” (ibid). Rather, user-generated content needs to be contextually located in order to elucidate practices and power relations (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 198-199).

While the ABC celebrates Heywire stories as evidence of youth engagement, representation and self-expression, and suggests that the large number of submissions to the annual competition are indicative of Heywire's usefulness as a platform on which youth can share their views, interviews with youth storytellers revealed that such an interpretation is too simplistic to represent what it is we are actually seeing when youth share stories in this project. For example, as will be discussed in chapter four, more than half of the youth interviewees described being heavily encouraged by their parents, teachers, and other adults close to them to enter a story in the Heywire competition. This is one finding that undermines the idea that Heywire stories are indicative of youth engagement or agency, and that young people's motivations for contributing to Heywire arise entirely through individual desires for self-representation and self-expression. Rather, it reveals that the intentions of others – in this specific instance, of adults – had a significant role in guiding young people's participation in this project.

Considerations such as these, and a critical approach to interpreting user-generated content such as Thornham and McFarlane demonstrate, are not intended to imply that content – like the narratives young people share via Heywire – is valueless, or that they display no degree of agency or individual expression at all. Rather, these are intended to highlight the complexity of intentions and relationships that are embedded in projects such as Heywire, and the ways in which these affect participation. While Heywire stories are produced through complex and interlinked intentions, motivations and relationships, the objectives of the ABC and other factors which influence youth participation do not fully guide or constrain it. The Heywire stories that can be seen on the website and many of the interviews with youth that informed this research reveal that Heywire fulfilled a useful function for this cohort. In some cases, young people can be seen to be repurposing the Heywire website to fulfil their own intentions for sharing stories. Such is especially clear of stories that deviate from the ABC's objectives and are recognisably not the sorts of stories that the broadcaster specifically aims to capture and amplify.

As participation is enabled and shaped by the precise affordances of any given platform, the nature of participation and its intensity must be considered and evaluated in the context in which it is practiced. Through posing the question 'Participation, but in what?' Jenkins and Carpentier advise making "sharper distinctions between different contexts and practices of participation" (2013, 9). While the broad definitions of what constitutes participation provide an important anchor, "specific participatory practices are characterized by specific power balances and struggles at different levels, moments and

locations” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 3). This means acknowledging that a project such as Heywire may never represent the equal distribution of power between all actors that might be seen in some community media (Carpentier 2003, 443); however, viewed in the PSM context in which it occurs, it can be viewed as a genuine attempt to enable young, rural and regional people to contribute their voices in the processes of meaning-making that affect their lives, and to invite them to craft and express their own identities rather than be represented by others.

Participation is a situated practice. The types of practices that constitute participation and the differing intensities of participatory actions are context-dependent. Nonetheless, a number of key criteria can be applied to determine the meaningfulness of participation within a particular context. In addition to more equalised power relationships and involvement in decision-making, meaning-making processes, Jenkins and Carpentier suggest that participation is also “a set of shared expectations”, and shared identities and values (2013, 9). Applied to Heywire, these criteria help illuminate some of the core contradictions within this project and the complex nature of audience participation within PSM. For example, the institution’s expectations for Heywire and understanding of what it means to participate in the project are not always shared by the youth participants. To some extent, participants and Heywire facilitators approach the project with different intentions and hopes for how youth will become involved and to what end. Such inconsistencies are at the heart of the tensions and competing agendas that characterise Heywire.

The precise set of expectations and shared values that participation revolves around in Heywire are that it is a platform that young people consciously access for one purpose: to share narratives about their lives in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia. It offers a distinct “genre of participation” (Ito et al. 2010, 15), and a different set of practices and mode of engagement with new media than that enabled by other mediated spaces that young people commonly use. For example, while social networks such as Facebook are emblematic of “friendship-driven practices” (ibid), Heywire invites participation based on an identity group and shared interests. Participants may claim allegiance to the ‘identity category’ rural, regional and youth in different ways, but the very fact that they have chosen to participate in Heywire is evidence of their affiliation.

The ABC’s aims for the project, dissected in depth in chapter three, reveal some different expectations and quite rigid, explicit and implicit criteria for participation. The

structure of Heywire, its nature as a PSM-managed platform, and the clear ways that storytelling is curated and shaped means that young people's activities in Heywire fall short of the notion of participation as equality of power (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 17). Although young people are invited to express and represent themselves in this project, the ABC's expectations for Heywire include capturing and amplifying a specific kind of narrative and voice. Such expectations enforce constraints on the sorts of stories that are told, how widely they shared, and suggest the intentions of youth are secondary to those of the ABC. As such, Heywire does not demonstrate more equal power relations between media professionals and audiences, and the Heywire website does not represent a platform that young people can use entirely for their own purposes, authoring and sharing narratives without restrictions and without interference.

While such features suggest only a limited form of participation, viewing Heywire in the PSM context in which it exists, such participation can still be meaningful. Taken for what it is and aims to do, the Heywire project does achieve one of the commitments of participatory culture in that it provides a space that enables a diversity of voices and perspectives to emerge, and in a way that at least attempts to ensure they are heard (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 19). The next section's discussion of digital storytelling, however, reveals that in spite of the aims and potential of projects such as Heywire, facilitating listening is a challenge in projects such as this. In the case of Heywire, the highly prescriptive nature of the project is one of its limitations, impacting upon the degree to which it may support its rural and regional youth participants to have their voices acknowledged by others.

Digital Storytelling

The ‘participatory turn’ in media culture and public service media’s explicit focus on user-created content was in part precipitated by digital storytelling and the principles upon which this practice was founded. The 1990s – the decade in which digital storytelling emerged and the ABC initiated Heywire – was an era of significant changes to technologies, and consequently of changes in structures of media production and consumption (Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 4-5). The Heywire project emerged within this context. This section historicises Heywire as broadly part of the digital storytelling ‘movement’ and discusses its continued reliance on the principles of this practice.

Origins

Digital storytelling emerged in the early 1990s as a response to the absence of “ordinary” people’s stories and voices in broadcast media (Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 3-4) and it represents a specific philosophy and set of practices around media production and life storytelling. Jean Burgess describes digital storytelling as a community media ‘movement’ and “a workshop-based process by which ‘ordinary people’ create their own short autobiographical films that can be streamed on the Web or broadcast on television” (Burgess 2006, 207). Its central aims are “to give a voice to the myriad tales of everyday life as experienced by ordinary people in their own terms” (Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 3). Digital stories are generally two to three minutes in length, made from a voiceover and about a dozen pictures – often photographs that the storyteller has brought from home (Burgess 2006, 207). According to Daniel Meadows, one of the early pioneers of the movement, digital stories have a scrapbook aesthetic (Meadows and Kidd 2009, 99).

The intentions of digital storytelling and the highly personal, scrapbook-style narrative suits the Heywire project. The assemblage of still photographs with a voiceover is a mode of narrative and self-expression that is highly accessible for young storytellers. Importantly, digital storytelling is not about training amateurs in professional media production, and digital stories do not tend to exhibit technological or design expertise (Lambert 2009, 87). Rather, the personal story, told in the storyteller’s own voice, is regarded as central to the power and potential of the digital story (Burgess 2006, 207; Poletti 2011, 74). According to Burgess, “[n]arrative accessibility, warmth, and presence are prioritised over formal experimentation or innovative ‘new’ uses for technologies” (2006,

207). Likewise, Heywire stories have traditionally been, and are still celebrated for their sincerity, warmth, and the simplicity of their telling.

Since the 1990s, digital storytelling has been extended well beyond its origins within community arts and community media into a variety of institutional and organisational settings, including public service broadcasting. Meadows's adaptation of digital storytelling for the BBC marks the first use of the form in the PSM context and signified the broadcaster's move away from an older, traditional broadcast model towards an increased focus on 'ordinary voices' and audience participation. Meadows writes that one of the objectives in proposing digital storytelling to the BBC was that "it would extend the corporation's track-record of 'listening to the voice of the people'" (Meadows 2003, 191). The digital storytelling projects initiated by the BBC were not the first instances of audience participation within the BBC, however, they differed significantly from other earlier participatory projects because, as Meadows and Jenny Kidd write, "for the first time in the history of broadcasting, a mainstream player was putting the tools of both production and editing into the hands of the audience" (Meadows and Kidd 2009, 100). What was exciting about digital storytelling, for Meadows, is that

no longer must the public tolerate being 'done' by media – that is, no longer must we tolerate media being done to us. No longer must we put up with professional documentarists recording us for hours and then throwing away most of what we tell them, keeping only those bits that tell our stories their own way and, more than likely, at our expense. If we will only learn the skills of digital storytelling then we can, quite literally, 'take the power back' (Meadows 2003, 192).

Digital storytelling offered a tool with which to respond to dissatisfaction or scepticism over official or elite sources of knowledge (Poletti 2011, 81). As an explicit move to facilitate self-representation and privilege 'ordinary voices' over authoritative sources, digital storytelling in part reflects the broader shift towards a more participatory culture (Hancox 2012, 67).

Digital storytelling and the Heywire project

In its initiation of Heywire in 1998, the ABC was clearly influenced by the digital storytelling movement and the changed culture of media production and consumption that it represented. Interestingly, though, this influence appears indirect and implicit since the ABC staff members who were involved in the earliest discussions around Heywire do not identify the project as having been influenced by digital storytelling. In the general

timeframe during which Heywire was founded, audience involvement was becoming an increasingly big focus for national broadcasters modelled on the 'Reithian trinity' (Martin 2002, 42; Enli 2008, 106). In the mid to late 1990s the ABC was trialling new forms of broadcast that would enable it to interact and connect with its audience, and hence reconfigure its traditionally static audience/ broadcaster relationship (Martin 2002, 48-49). It is more than likely that the BBC's approach to engaging the audience and amplifying their voices through digital storytelling was in part the ABC's inspiration for Heywire.

Heywire appears to have come to digital storytelling via a rather evolutionary process. It is more obviously like digital storytelling now than it was when it began. According to the project's Executive Producer Dan Hirst, the model of storytelling and storysharing that digital storytelling presented was 'part of the dialogue' at the ABC in the mid to late 1990s (Hirst, personal conversation, June 2014). Hirst stated that "still photographs with two to three minutes of voiceover makes for a really effective story, and it's a straightforward way for young people to be involved" (ibid). The ABC had clearly acknowledged that members of its audience could be engaged quite easily and effectively through inviting them to tell personal stories using materials that were readily available to them, such as personal photographs, combined with audio recordings of short anecdotes. Heywire emerged within this milieu. The central objectives upon which this project was founded and the style of narrative it produces have always mirrored the broader principles of digital storytelling.

The aspirations that storytelling, combined with technologies of various kinds, would enable a variety of unheard stories and viewpoints to be brought forward and acknowledged, are key in the ABC's approach to Heywire. Heywire was created to "give voice" to a group whose voices and viewpoints were not easily heard (McKenzie and James 2003, vii), and it asks rural and regional youth to "tell it like it is" and "show the world what matters in your life" by submitting short, personal stories to the annual Heywire competition (Heywire 2013a). In contrast to the workshop-based process of storytelling and the digital distribution of life narratives that are traditional features of the digital storytelling model, Heywire began as an ABC Radio project that aimed to amplify young people's voices through broadcasting their stories on ABC Local Radio in rural and regional areas across Australia.

I grew up in rural Queensland and heard these stories broadcast on the radio every summer. I might have been helping my parents draft cattle, or strain a fence, but I

remember pausing to listen. We stood together in the shade, by the ute, and the voice of a young person would crackle over the radio until Dad adjusted the tuning. The stories lasted three or four minutes and varied in style: a few were similar to personal essays, seemingly scripted to inform an unknowing audience that good cropping land in the Darling Downs was being destroyed by coal mines, or that rural students have less access to sports and recreation facilities than their urban counterparts. The storyteller often ended with a message suggesting ‘something needs to be done’. Others shared anecdotes and personal experiences. We laughed as a girl described squeezing into a white, satin gown for her debutante ball – the highlight of her senior school year. The story was broadcast complete with sound effects of sliding zippers. On a different day, another girl spoke of a fight with anorexia and the stigmas attached to eating disorders in her home town. “People think this only happens in the city”, she said, and her voice was sad.

Through these anecdotes and simple descriptions of struggles and hopes, the storytellers opened a small window into lives I could relate to or empathise with. All of them, somehow, were moving. They could have us returning to our work in the paddock with smiles on our faces, or uncomfortably silent and avoiding each other’s eyes until another radio segment cleared our memories of the story that had disturbed us. While these stories were audio only and lacked the visual component that characterises digital stories, they were similarly affecting and characterised by their warmth and sincerity. Now, with the Heywire website, the ABC particularly encourages young people to share audio visual stories that are assemblages of text, audio and photographs and hence have the ‘scrapbook aesthetic’ of traditional digital stories.

Diverse contexts, similar intentions

Over the years, digital storytelling has been taken up in a variety of different ways around the world, adapted to suit different contexts and to fulfil specific objectives. While these projects are mostly founded on the general aim to amplify ordinary voices and stories (Burgess 2006, 207), there are a number of well-documented digital storytelling projects whose additional aspirations resemble those of Heywire and therefore provide particularly interesting points for comparison. Most of these projects followed the traditional workshop-based model of digital storytelling and are successful examples of the practice being used to facilitate voice and self-representation amongst marginalised or voiceless groups. These projects closely mirror Heywire in intention, however, it is important to note

that most of them were initiated many years ago and have now ended while Heywire is a current project that has striven to redefine itself in order to remain relevant in what is now a very different media landscape. Heywire is still heavily reliant on the principles of digital storytelling, despite changes to technologies, and it is an example of the ongoing relevance of such projects “as a means of occasioning life narrative” (Poletti 2011, 74). Significantly, it is also an example of the need for such projects to adapt to suit the contemporary, highly participatory media environment.

Of course, as an ABC-managed project that invites self-representational storytelling from ‘the audience’, Heywire has a great deal in common with the BBC’s two digital storytelling projects, Capture Wales (CW) and London’s Voices (LV). Some of the ABC’s assertions about the Heywire project echo Meadows’s (2003) hopes for digital storytelling at the BBC. Most prevalent are the ideas that by inviting people to share their personal stories, projects such as the BBC’s Capture Wales and London’s Voices, and the ABC’s Heywire, demonstrate a reshaping of traditional structures of voice and representation. As Couldry argues, “digital storytelling contributes to a wider democratization of media resources” because it vastly extends the number of people whose voices can be registered as contributing to the public domain (Couldry 2008, 386-387). These principles appear an important part of broadcasters’ inviting and amplifying the voices of its audiences. In both Capture Wales and Heywire there is firm suggestion that, through self-representational storytelling, “the public” may tell their stories their own way rather than accept representations of their lives and identities delivered by media professionals (Meadows 2003, 192). As was stated on the Heywire website in 2011:

Heywire provides a fantastic, innovative, safe and ready-made vehicle for youth to voice their concerns, issues, hopes and opinions about life in regional and rural Australia. This voice comes straight from the source, without being filtered through particular agendas, summarised in reports by journalists or simplified by media stereotyping (Heywire 2011).

Here, Heywire is presented as a way through which young people can challenge stereotypical representations of their identities by representing their own lives, in an apparently unmediated and authentic way.

Notions of truth and authenticity are amongst the key themes in the ABC’s framing of the Heywire project, and as Thumim (2009) points out, these themes are central to the logic of the BBC’s two digital storytelling projects. Thumim writes “[t]he implication is that CW and LV each provide the audience with access to the real, and that this is a more

authentic reality than that delivered by professionals, precisely because people represent themselves” (Thumim 2009, 623). I would also argue that ideas of truth and authenticity are integral in the philosophy around digital storytelling since it is based on sharing life narratives. Yet, the idea of authenticity has a particularly interesting poignancy in the context of PSM. Facilitators suggest that projects such as CW, LV and Heywire deliver stories and voices that are ‘unfiltered’. For example, Thumim describes that the BBC felt that “real lives” are often observed, told and shaped by BBC professionals, and that digital storytelling reversed this trend (2009, 623). These observations can be applied to Heywire: “regional youth telling it like it is” is meant to present a far more real, authentic account of young people’s rural lives than accounts delivered by journalists.

Through Heywire, the ABC demonstrates to youth that their stories matter and that others care about what they have to say. Further, the ABC constructs Heywire as ‘storytelling for a purpose’ and establishes a clear link between telling stories and achieving tangible results. As I discuss in chapter three, the notion that Heywire stories must *do something* specific is an area of tension within the project; however, Heywire’s indication that young people’s voices will be ‘heard’ and that they can ‘make a difference’ likely encourages some participants to share their stories and empowers them to feel their voices are valued.

There are many examples of the effectiveness of digital storytelling as a methodology for engaging and empowering marginalised individuals and groups, two of which include the Finding a Voice project and the Youth Internet Radio Network (YIRN). Some of the aims and focusses of these projects resemble those of Heywire, and hence provide good points for comparison. Finding a Voice and YIRN both had a strong emphasis on fostering participation through creative content production and sought to empower project participants through providing them with an opportunity for voice and self-representation.

Delivered across various parts of south east Asia between 2006-2008, the Finding a Voice project is a powerful example that demonstrates the potential of workshop-based digital storytelling to support profoundly marginalised individuals and groups to express their voices and participate in meaning-making processes through being involved in the development of locally-produced content (Tacchi 2009). The project aimed to increase understanding of how new and traditional Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) could effectively be used to promote participation in content creation (Tacchi 2012,

656), and “to empower poor people to communicate their ‘voices’ within and beyond marginalised communities” (Tacchi 2009, 169). Jo Tacchi emphasises that “[t]he stress here is on community-produced media content and participatory approaches to its development ... In this context, can digital storytelling provide a mechanism for participatory development?” (Tacchi 2009, 171) She suggests that digital storytelling was a logical and effective means for combining ICT with the desire to promote voice in a development context (ibid, 169): “digital storytelling is essentially about the expression of personal voice” (Tacchi 2009, 171), and as such it allowed a diversity of voices and perspectives to emerge. Further, since digital stories can be distributed in a variety of formats (ibid, 172), it proved an effective means for voice to be promoted and heard.

The Australian project YIRN was an online network and website designed to “promote the production and distribution of creative content by young people” (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 73). It aimed to engage young people, especially those living in regional areas of Queensland, through fostering their participation in content creation and providing them with a website on which to share this content and interact with each other on topics of relevance to them (ibid). As Tanya Notley and Tacchi describe, some of the objectives of YIRN included establishing a network of young content providers across the state of Queensland, and exploring how young people could represent their lives and explore different issues through participation in an online youth network (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 73). The focus of YIRN was on creative content production and ICTs, particularly the internet, for engagement. As such, YIRN was not based primarily on the principles and processes of digital storytelling. Yet digital storytelling was important as a methodology used to train young people in the creation of new media content (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 78; Burgess and Fallu 2007, 136). The digital stories produced during four day workshops were distributed via the website, along with other content that young people created by themselves, outside of the workshop environment.

Both Heywire and YIRN share an aim to engage ‘peripheral youth’ through a website and ‘online network’ and through creative processes such as digital storytelling. For Notley and Tacchi, “‘Peripheral’ youth refers to young people living outside of national and global cultural and economic core centres” (2005, 74). In the context of YIRN, these young people were from regional parts of Queensland and youth “whose access to new media technologies and diverse audiences is limited due to geographical, social and cultural contexts” (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 73). Heywire similarly aims to engage a marginal or minority group of young people who have traditionally had limited means for having their

views and voices recognised by others. The use of a website and the production of creative content such as stories for engagement and for enabling a variety of young people to participate are other similarities between the two projects.

Unlike Heywire, though, YIRN was a research project initiated by the Queensland University of Technology in the early 2000s and was an experiment into the uses and possibilities of ICTs for engaging peripheral youth and enabling them to participate (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 73). While YIRN concluded as an interesting experiment and research opportunity, Heywire has continued to remain important to the ABC and it continues to aspire to its original aims of facilitating voice despite a significantly changed media environment. One of the important outcomes of YIRN was that “producing creative content appears to allow young people the opportunity to subvert and challenge the way they are perceived and represented” (Notley and Tacchi 2005, 80), and this remains a major aim for Heywire.

While Heywire is similarly concerned with empowering young people and facilitating voice through a combination of personal storytelling and technologies, this project exists in a media landscape and cultural context that is very different from that of Finding a Voice and YIRN. The value of the digital storytelling methodology in the Finding a Voice project was that it offered participants a rare opportunity to learn skills in digital content production, to express and more widely promote their voices and views, and to participate in meaning-making and decision-making processes (Tacchi 2009, 169, 2012, 657). Similarly, in YIRN digital storytelling workshops were a means of fostering youth participation and training young people in content creation, through which they could tell their own stories, express their opinions and represent their own lives (Hartley et al. 2003). Such opportunities were unique and valuable for individuals in the marginalised communities in which these projects were delivered. However, YIRN and the Finding a Voice projects were initiated in the early to mid-2000s, and the current media landscape now affords a greater variety of opportunities and spaces for self-representation and self-expression. The rapid evolution of digital technologies and the emergence of media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube have presented challenges for the Heywire project and prompted it to redefine itself to demonstrate its continued value to the youth it seeks to engage.

Although Heywire has adopted some newer technologies and incorporates an online storytelling platform, its approach to encouraging young people to create and share

narratives remains firmly entrenched in the traditional logic of digital storytelling and the 'scrapbook style' narrative. The power of the personal story is emphasised as the most important part of the process and the use of technologies is secondary to this. When the Heywire website was new, the ABC likened it to YouTube (Sadov 2009, 3) because it allowed young people to upload their own audio-video stories and comment on other people's content; yet, it has also striven to differentiate itself from other platforms by emphasising that sharing stories via Heywire means young people's voices will be acknowledged, and in a way that enables them to affect social or political change. As described on the website, Heywire is "a powerful platform for your stories, ideas and opinions" (Heywire 2010), and, "[m]ost importantly, Heywire provides an audience" (Heywire 2011). The ABC is obviously aware that young people are using the internet and new, digital media in numerous ways to express themselves and represent their lives. Its approach to demonstrating Heywire's uniqueness is to highlight that Heywire enables young people's voices to be heard, and that by sharing their stories and opinions they raise awareness of important issues and can inspire positive change in rural and regional Australia (Heywire 2010). However, as will be discussed later in this section, facilitating listening and enabling participants' voices to be 'heard' is a challenge for Heywire, and for digital storytelling more broadly. While Heywire seems successful in supporting young people's self-expression and self-representation, it is less effective in enabling a multitude of youth voices to be heard.

The identification of issues that affect rural and regional youth and increasing other people's awareness of these are pitched as important reasons for participating in Heywire and sharing stories. While achieving these goals and promoting positive change in regional communities are most clearly the purpose of the Heywire Regional Youth Summit, an event I detail in chapter three, these aims are also clear in Heywire's initial invitation to rural and regional youth to share stories about their lives. The Summit and Heywire's political agendas are quite clearly in many ways at odds with the principles of digital storytelling and the project's invitation to youth to share stories about their lives, yet the use of personal narrative for addressing an issue also works in some complementary ways. For example, over the years, many Heywire storytellers have shared narratives about a personal struggle with illness or disability and at the Summit, Heywire winners have used these stories to draw attention to their concerns about mental health and disability services in regional towns.

The use of personal storytelling, in addition to various technologies, for raising awareness of issues and concerns that are shared by a particular group of people, and for stimulating discussion and debate over these, marks a point of strong similarity between the Finding a Voice project and Heywire. Finding a Voice was interested in the extent to which personal stories and voices could promote positive social change (Tacchi 2009, 172). According to Tacchi, both the project and its participants wanted to produce content that highlighted issues or had some advocacy component, and the digital storytelling workshops were often geared to assist participants to create content that explored local concerns (ibid; Tacchi 2012, 660). She describes that participants' digital stories were often "based on issues that they felt needed to be explored and discussed in their communities such as alcoholism and domestic violence" (Tacchi 2012, 660). Further, the local screenings of the stories frequently led to debates about important local issues, raised awareness, and were effective in encouraging other people to create their own content and have a voice (Tacchi 2009, 173). Referring to the screening of digital stories made by young women at one of the project's sites in India, Tacchi writes:

The fact that the issue [of domestic violence] was raised through content created by local young women, in their own voice, made the issue easier to discuss, overcoming taboos, and opening up a space for sharing different viewpoints and opinions (2012, 660).

Although Heywire does not explicitly demand youth tell stories in which they identify issues that are of concern to them and to other people within their community, the personal story forms the basis of the ABC's approach to engaging rural and regional youth in a process of meaning-making, self-expression, and in demonstrating to others their experiences of life in rural, regional or remote Australia. Heywire provides a website on which young people can contribute personal stories and in doing so 'open a window into their lives' (Hirst 2012; Heywire 2013b). As a result, the Heywire website attracts a variety of experiences, stories, voices and perspectives. Similar to the Finding a Voice project, through storytelling Heywire encourages a variety of different voices and perspectives to emerge. Most Heywire stories are anecdotal and depict personal experiences or thoughts, while others are similar to personal essays and clearly identify social issues such as body image or drink driving. Tacchi's observation that some stories may appear more 'valid' than others in terms of promoting change (Tacchi 2009, 174) can hence be applied to Heywire.

In addition to the Finding a Voice project, there are numerous other examples of digital storytelling projects which demonstrate the effectiveness of the form for engaging

and empowering marginalised individuals through supporting them to express their voices and craft and represent their identities through narrative and digital tools. The workshops held within a community technology centre called Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY) in West Oakland in America is one such example. DUSTY was established in an urban community “in the grip of poverty and the educational and social inequities that accompany it” (Hull and Katz 2006, 48); its aim was to support disadvantaged adults and young people to “fashion identities as competent actors in the world able to influence the direction and course of their lives” (ibid, 47). Glynda Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz describe that the aim of the digital storytelling workshops at DUSTY was to provide the technology, digital tools and “and to foster the supportive social relationships and forms of participation that would make it possible, even likely, for individuals to envision and enact agentic selves” (Hull and Katz 2006, 48). Their work demonstrates that opportunities for participation, along with the combination of multiple media and narrative that digital storytelling provides, can effectively support individuals to build positive identities, and “reposition themselves as agents in and authors of their own lives” (Hull and Katz 2006, 69), in spite of challenging circumstances.

Hull and Katz argue that DUSTY participants’ digital stories were “performative moments” and particularly intensive acts of self-articulation and self-construction (2006, 56). The processes of narrative and “multimedia composing” that digital storytelling involves are interwoven with processes of identity development (Hull and Katz 2006, 65), and personal stories can as such be interpreted as sites of self-construction and self-representation – a notion that I take up in depth in chapter five. Such can also be seen in Heywire. In crafting their stories through a combination of media such as audio, photographs, video and text, individuals are also creating and articulating their identities, and doing so authoritatively and purposefully. Hull and Katz describe that participation in digital storytelling provided individuals with the means to position themselves as “authors of their own lives” (2006, 69). Similarly, by creating and sharing self-representational stories for Heywire, young people can be seen to be exercising control over constructions of their identities, representing and expressing themselves as they want to be seen and heard by others. While the contemporary media landscape means that young people have numerous tools and spaces in which to represent their identities and express their views, opportunities and spaces for narrative provide occasions for particularly meaningful acts of self-interpretation and identity construction. By inviting young people to share personal

stories, Heywire, similar to DUSTY, provides a unique space for narrative self-representation and ‘narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1980, 1992), a concept I discuss in chapter five.

Of course, there are some distinct differences between DUSTY and the Heywire project. Most obviously, DUSTY was a community centre and provided digital storytelling workshops where participants learned to use various technologies. Further, it was a “supportive social space” (Hull and Katz 2006, 52) which was central to participants’ developing their digital stories and authoring their identities in purposeful, ‘agentic’ ways. Heywire, by contrast, is not primarily a workshop-based project; it simply provides a website and invites youth to populate it with their own individually-crafted content. As such, it does not provide the sociality nor foster the sorts of relationships that were central to the success of DUSTY.

DUSTY is an excellent example of the centrality of the workshop in digital storytelling projects and the significance of face to face interaction between participants and workshop facilitators. Echoing the traditional philosophy of digital storytelling developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling³, and the “conversational context” for media that Joe Lambert posits as key to the practice (Lambert 2006, 16-17), Hull and Katz emphasise the importance of the social context and supportive social relationships (Hull and Katz 2006, 48). For example, one participant at DUSTY, thirteen year-old Dara,

was able to negotiate what she wrote about and how she represented herself to the world. She accomplished this not only through her digital stories, but also through her social relationships with DUSTY peers, mentors and facilitators who helped build Dara’s perception of herself as an expert digital storyteller (Hull and Katz 2006, 61).

The digital tools, resources and social opportunities provided through DUSTY were all central to Dara’s authoring and coming to know herself as a writer, storyteller and experienced member of the DUSTY community (Hull and Katz 2006, 66).

The ABC appear to recognise the workshop-based approach as important because, in recent years, they have striven to deliver Heywire storytelling workshops in regional

³ The Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) is a community arts organisation in Berkeley, California, that has been foundational in the development and spread of digital storytelling around the world (Beeson and Miskelly 2005; Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 8). It continues to represent a methodology for telling and producing personal stories that is regarded as the tradition of digital storytelling (Thumim 2012, 75; Poletti 2011).

schools, universities and community centres in various parts of Australia. These workshops are facilitated by Heywire's online producer, Jonathan Atkins, and differ significantly from digital storytelling workshops. Atkins describes the workshops as two sessions of one hour in length. The first session involves brainstorming ideas for a story, and the second session might involve a photo workshop, but other times he focusses on the development of the text-based story (Atkins, interview, November 2012).

The differences between Atkins's workshops and those of traditional digital storytelling can be attributed to a number of factors including time constraints in university tutorials and high school classrooms, the different needs of youth participants, and the priorities that underpin the Heywire project. In the late 1990s and early 2000s an important part of digital storytelling workshops was to teach people how to use various digital tools such as video editing software. Now, however, with the widespread availability and use of smartphones, digital cameras and the internet, it might be assumed that youth are familiar with numerous sorts of technologies, and are able to create their own short films and animations. For ABC staff, it might not seem necessary to spend workshop time training youth to create their own digital content; rather, narrative and the authoring of a 'good story' is priority in Heywire storytelling workshops. Echoing the idea that "despite the term "digital" in digital storytelling, the emphasis is on the *story* and the *telling*" (Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 3), the Heywire website states that "Heywire is not about being the best writer or media maker, it's about showing the rest of Australia what life is like for young people in your part of the country" (Heywire 2014b). Subsequently, Heywire workshops focus on the brainstorming and composing of a personal narrative.

Due to the expanse of the continent, Heywire does not provide face to face workshops to all of the rural and regional youth it seeks to engage. Heywire supplement by encouraging Australian secondary school teachers to incorporate the project into the school curriculum. As described on the website,

Heywire provides a 'real life' task for students doing units about identity, place, journeys, belonging or any other unit that involves producing personal narratives. For a simple 3-page lesson plan to run Heywire in a year 10, 11 or 12 English or media studies class download our *Heywire Secondary Teaching Notes* (Heywire 2011).

The Heywire Teaching Notes created by The Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) help teachers to guide students in the creation of a narrative, and provide worksheets for students. These worksheets reveal that the ABC's approach to making

Heywire a part of classrooms and encouraging youth to make audio-visual stories is based on the logic of traditional storytelling or personal essay writing. The worksheets ask students to answer a series of questions, including:

1. What is the topic/issue being presented?
2. In two sentences, summarise the story or the speaker's perspective.
3. What is the tone of the piece? Provide evidence to illustrate your answer.
6. How does the story achieve its purpose of giving a voice to regional and rural youth? (VATE 2011)

While such guidelines are potentially useful for some students, it appears others do not find these effective for creating narratives, or experience the classroom environment as an adequately supportive space for telling personal stories. Many of the Heywire profile pages that appeared to have been created at schools were empty⁴ – people had obtained a membership and username but had not added any personal details or uploaded any content. Profile names such as 'GRIFF IS COOL' and 'DOWEHAVEPETODAY' are giveaways of classroom-created memberships. Although these young people had no stories of their own, some had posted comments on other members' profiles, writing "hey, I'm messaging you but I'm sitting right beside you!" and "This is the gayest English lesson ever. Why do we have to do this?" Perhaps in a classroom environment, pressured by time constraints and the requirement to 'tell a story for Heywire', young people are not effectively engaged or supported to create a narrative.

Hull and Katz surmise that "alternative spaces for learning can sometimes effectively support adolescents' interests in literacy and foster their developing sense of agency" (Hull and Katz 2006, 61). Many young people hold negative feelings towards school and find it a place of rules and strictures where they cannot be themselves. If 'create a story for Heywire' was assigned as homework, for instance, it is understandable youth would harbour negative feelings towards the project. Subsequently, workshops run outside of school would be more effective spaces for individuals to be creative and feel that they can

⁴ This observation was prior to the deleting of the Heywire profile pages and membership function in July 2014.

be the authors of their own stories and identities. Storytelling on the Heywire website seems to work best when youth are able to approach it willingly, and when they perceive the invitation to share stories as an opportunity, rather than a task that adults have demanded of them.

Making Heywire a part of school and classroom-based activities is important for the ABC since a lot of Heywire story entries are acquired this way. 2012 Heywire winner Beth⁵ describes that she created her Heywire story for a university assignment and, while she was glad that “uni finally made me tell my story!” she also indicates that it was an onerous task. She states,

because it was a uni assessment I had that, “Aw, I don’t want to even look at Heywire anymore” feel. Originally when I submitted my entry it didn’t work properly and they [the ABC] called me and I was so annoyed it hadn’t worked, because I was going home that day and we had no internet at home at the time, so I was just going to leave it but I’m really happy that I resubmitted it because look what’s happened! (laughs) (interview, December 2013).

The project appears to lose a lot of its appeal when it is incorporated into an adult-monitored classroom environment. It becomes an activity that is required and coerced, rather than a youth-driven chance for self-expression and self-representation. While the ABC upholds the Heywire project as an opportunity and space in which young people can share thoughts and ideas, “create, discuss, debate, and be yourself” (Ives 2008), in the classroom environment young people’s participation becomes heavily framed and shaped by the educational institution, and this challenges the notion that Heywire presents the possibility for youth to be empowered through expressing their views in their own voices.

Projects such as DUSTY, Finding a Voice and Heywire recognise the personal story as a powerful and highly accessible means of self-representation and self-expression. The impact of narrative is enhanced through audio and visual tools, and, via digital technologies and the internet stories can be shared widely and quickly (Hancox 2012, 65-66). Stories and voices that have in the past been unheard can therefore potentially reach large and diverse audiences. Digital storytelling is therefore useful and effective for supporting disadvantaged and traditionally voiceless groups to express their voices and viewpoints. Further, these

⁵ Names of all youth participants have been changed to protect their anonymity, in accordance with QUT Ethics requirements (research approval number 1200000315).

projects demonstrate the usefulness of storytelling, in combination with technologies, for promoting participation amongst disengaged or disempowered individuals and groups. For instance, the Finding a Voice project sought to enable “poor people” to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes that affect them (Tacchi 2009, 169). Tacchi writes that “[e]vidence shows that effective participation can give people a sense of belonging and control over their lives” (2012, 654). The ABC appears to conform to such a notion in its approach to Heywire.

Differences and new developments

Evidently, the Heywire project has much in common with the digital storytelling movement, and with numerous projects in which the principles and process of digital storytelling have been core. However, while I align Heywire with digital storytelling and argue that it was inspired by the principles of this movement, I do not describe it as a digital storytelling project due to a number of pronounced differences. For example, Heywire has never been a primarily workshop-based project; it simply provides a website and invites youth to populate it with their own individually-crafted content. As a result, Heywire stories do not always look like digital stories. They are always personal and anecdotal, yet they are not always the two to three minute audio visual narratives that are recognisably digital stories. Furthermore, despite the Heywire project’s central aims around ideas of voice and self-representation, it is a project of numerous, often conflicting agendas, some of which seem to have little to do with its aims to provide rural and regional youth with a platform for voice and a space in which to share stories. The variety of aims of Heywire, and the tensions that these produce within the project, will be discussed in the next chapter.

In recent years there has been an obvious push for Heywire to follow the conventions of workshop-based digital storytelling. For example, even though Heywire invites young people to share stories in any form of media, including video, photography, audio, text, or a combination of these, the Heywire website offers some loose guidelines for storytelling: “there is no hard and fast limit, but we recommend text entries be roughly 400 words, video and audio be about 3 minutes and series of photos contain 10 images that tell a story” (Heywire 2011). Dan Hirst states that the audio-visual model of story traditional to digital storytelling makes for a highly engaging narrative that is suitable for Heywire’s online context (personal conversation, June 2014). He also suggests that such a model is “a straightforward way for young people to be involved” (ibid). True to the traditional

strategies of digital storytelling, still photographs, combined with two to three minutes of voiceover is valued as a simple though effective means through which people may express and represent their own lives and stories.

The Heywire storytelling workshops and the Teaching Notes downloadable from the website are designed to support young people to produce digital stories in the traditional way – a short narrative recorded as a voiceover which is often accompanied by photographs or other images. As Hirst indicates, this is effective because it is ‘straightforward’ and simple; however, it is possible that the traditional model of digital storytelling may also present challenges because it does not reflect the ways that young people are currently engaging with and using new media to express their voices and share their views. Sharing personal stories digitally is now ubiquitous in everyday life. Short, personal videos can be created with inexpensive, easily accessible software, apps and video editing tools, on mobile phones, and distributed via YouTube, social media and blogs. Some researchers argue that technological developments mean it is now time to expand or reimagine digital storytelling “so that we can invite a fuller consideration of and experimentation with the resources available to composers in the new media era” (Fulwiler and Middleton 2012, 49).

Megan Fulwiler and Kim Middleton point out that digital storytelling is problematically imbricated in “the cultural logic of old media” (2012, 40): its processes are tied to text-based practices which does not account for the new media composing processes in the current digital age, and which is divorced from the way that people – specifically youth – are now using new media to compose short videos (Fulwiler and Middleton 2012, 49). According to Fulwiler and Middleton, while traditional process of creating digital stories was highly successful in the past, “[o]ur new historical moment, however, enjoys a different cultural logic with its own attendant practices, possibilities, and processes grounded in the characteristics inherent to new media: variability, mutability, modularity” (ibid, 42). This suggests that the traditional digital storytelling process in which participants are invited to create, script and storyboard a linear narrative, then incorporate still photographs which correspond to certain story themes, is outdated.

Compared with the extensive body of literature on various applications of digital storytelling and the usefulness of the form, there is a relatively small amount of scholarship that considers the potentials that contemporary media afford digital storytelling. Many digital storytelling projects demonstrate that new media technologies afford many new

possibilities in terms of story distribution; comparatively fewer consider what these technologies might mean for the process of facilitation of storytelling projects. One example to the contrary can be found in Wilma Clark et al. (2014) who discuss the use of digital storytelling in the highly structured institution of high school. Researchers used Twitter to create a sustainable ‘story circle’ where young people could discuss ideas, express their voices, and be engaged as active participants. The technology enabled the story circle to be online and ongoing, rather than finite and be face to face (Clark, Couldry, MacDonald, et al. 2014).

Other writers and researchers have suggested that the definition of digital storytelling ought to be broadened to refer to the whole spectrum of ways that people are using digital technologies to author and share narratives (Couldry 2008, 374; Alexander 2011). For example, Bryan Alexander (2011) acknowledges that new technologies have enabled a series of new narrative forms to emerge as well as diverse new platforms from which to share them, and he therefore suggests that understanding the term ‘digital storytelling’ as descriptive of the traditional approach developed by the Center for Digital Storytelling in the early 1990s is far too narrow for describing the variety of ways people are now creating stories digitally. Stories are being told and shared across multiple, networked media platforms as in Transmedia storytelling (Elwell 2014), and the now commonplace processes of sharing personal stories and representing the self are multimodal, dispersed and episodic. Alexander argues that digital storytelling ought to refer to “the broader world of computer-mediated narrative” (Alexander 2011, 40) and includes alternate reality games, blogs, social media such as Twitter and Facebook, Wikis and podcasts within his broad suite of forms of digital storytelling. Interestingly, though, Alexander (2011) still privileges digital storytelling as a workshop-based practice.

Viewpoints such as these usefully draw attention to the fact that there are a variety of tools and platforms in which people are representing themselves and creating and distributing personal stories; however I would argue that social media and gaming are entirely, generically different forms of narrative than the self-representational style of storytelling that is privileged in projects such as Heywire, DUSTY and Finding a Voice. To use the term ‘digital storytelling’ to describe personal videos on YouTube, blogging practices, social-media, or the broad variety of user-created content that could be thought of as narrative, is to ignore the uniqueness of digital storytelling as a facilitated participatory media practice, an intentional media engagement with explicit purposes (Spurgeon et al. 2009, 276), and a precise set of principles around ‘ordinary voices’ and storytelling.

Despite some suggestions that digital storytelling should be “expanded” and “reimagined” (Fulwiler and Middleton 2012, 49) it is likely that the ‘old media logic’ is one of the features of Heywire – and of digital storytelling – that renders it appealing. Heywire is highly accessible, asking only for a short life narrative, and it does not require expert use of digital media or video-making software, or particularly sophisticated storytelling skills. As a result, while some young people may feel they lack the skills to write their own blog or make videos for YouTube, Heywire might seem to have lower barriers to access. The project also offers a sense of shared experience – all contributors are young people from rural and regional areas in Australia – and while it does not function as an online community, there is a sense of like-mindedness that may contribute to youth feeling that the website is a safe and accepting space for sharing stories and expressing their voices.

The emphasis on voice, captured and amplified by means of the personal story, remains a distinguishing, celebrated feature of digital storytelling and of the Heywire project. However, more recently, digital storytelling and other forms of participatory media has been critiqued for over-emphasising voice while overlooking ‘listening’ as its vital corollary (see for example Crawford 2009, 2011; Macnamara 2013; Dreher 2012, 2010). Facilitating voice has been privileged as the key requirement for participation in the media, and increased ability to express one’s views and represent oneself has been upheld as one of the democratising potentials of digital storytelling (Couldry 2008, 386); yet, there is a need to investigate the processes and conditions of reception, attention and response if voice is to be effective. As Tanja Dreher urges, “we must attend closely to the practices and politics of ‘listening’ in order to achieve meaningful voice” (2012, 158).

Discussing digital storytelling projects facilitated by Information Cultural Exchange (ICE), “a new media arts organisation working in Sydney’s cosmopolitan western suburbs” (Dreher 2012, 157), Dreher argues that opportunities for voice often go hand in hand with a failure to listen. She expresses this as “tensions between the celebration of voice and the challenge of political listening that might ensure what Nick Couldry terms ‘voice as a value’” (Dreher 2012, 157). The way digital storytelling facilitators at ICE envisaged voice reflects the approaches taken in the Finding a Voice project and in Heywire. In these three projects “having a voice” and “speaking up” refers not only to the process of expressing one’s views, but of participating in decision-making processes (Dreher 2012, 160-161; Tacchi 2012) and influencing the decisions that affect one’s life (Tacchi 2010). Echoing the aims of Heywire, facilitators and participants at ICE wanted digital stories and personal voices to be heard by decision-makers and policymakers such as Australia’s Prime Minister (Dreher 2012, 161).

Yet, Dreher indicates that the participants' "speaking up" and "claiming 'voice'" was over-celebrated as the endpoint of the digital storytelling projects, "rather than as the starting point for institutional listening that might ensure the voices of participants truly matters" (Dreher 2012, 164). The screening events for ICE digital stories successfully celebrated the achievements of the storytellers; however, they were less successful in generating listening and engagement with the issues raised in their narratives (Dreher 2012, 161-162).

An absence of listening, in part exacerbated by overvaluing mere processes of self-representation and voice, is a limitation of Heywire. Like the ICE digital storytelling projects Dreher (2012) describes, in Heywire voice is privileged as a key outcome of the project while processes of listening receive comparatively little attention. It is clear that Heywire facilitators value the vital counterpart to voice – being 'heard' – and seek to achieve this through the Regional Youth Summit which puts competition winners "at the centre of the conversations that shape their communities" (Heywire 2015a). As will be described in more depth in chapter three, at the Summit youth participants meet Federal Members of Parliament and various politicians, workshop ideas for positive change in regional areas, and present these ideas to Government officials within Parliament House. While there is a critique to be made about Heywire's focus on the Summit and its privileging of competition winners, this is in many ways a pragmatism within the project. Through the Summit and the face-to-face interactions with ABC staff, politicians and policymakers that this event enables, Heywire ensures that at least some voices are heard.

For competition winners and Summit attendees, Heywire may facilitate listening and encourage young people to feel that their stories and ideas are heard and valued. However, the majority of young storytellers who represent their lives and express their voices on the Heywire website do not receive such recognition for their stories. For most Heywire participants, their narratives exist on the website, but the storyteller will not know whether anyone has read or heard it. For non-winning storytellers, then, Heywire might facilitate voice, but it fails markedly to listen.

Dreher suggests the processes and politics of listening are a challenge for digital storytelling more broadly. She states that while there is "no doubt that digital storytelling projects have democratised media production and allowed untold stories to be shared, the key challenge of 'voice that matters' remains at best partially achieved" (Dreher 2012, 165). The digital storytelling projects at ICE and projects such as Heywire display "a tension, then, between the aim of facilitating voice for individuals who are rarely heard in the media, and

the limited mode of listening”, generated in part by an over-celebration of the processes of “speaking up” and expressing one’s views (Dreher 2012, 162).

For participants, it is possible that a project like Heywire overpromises and under-delivers on its claim to “give voice” since its capacity to facilitate self-expression is greater than its aptitude for acknowledging and responding to the multiplicity of voices that it brings forth. Heywire might encompass the potential to engage unheard voices and enable young, regional Australians to participate in the shaping of meanings, such as identities and representations of society; however, its limitations to do with listening are likely to undermine the possibilities that emerge through “allowing the silenced to speak” (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 199), such as the chance to rewrite homogenising or degrading representations of lives and identities. As Dreher suggests, the difficulty of producing change is not so much an inability to speak up, but rather an inability to listen when new voices do emerge (Dreher 2010, 98). The precise ways in which Heywire strives to facilitate voice and its shortcomings and successes in terms of listening to its participants will be investigated further in chapters four and five.

Youth and New Media

The Heywire project's successes, as well as its shortcomings, have a lot to do with the media landscape in which it sits, including the ways youth are using other types of new media and the forms of participation, self-representation and self-expression these enable. Heywire began as a purely radio-based storytelling project in 1998, however, through creating the 'Heywire Blog' in 2008 the ABC sought to adapt the project to suit an increasingly interactive, participatory media environment. The approach taken to the creation of Heywire's storytelling platform and the assertions made regarding its functionality are indicative of the ABC's attempts to preserve the project's meaningfulness in a highly dynamic, participatory media landscape.

This section contextualises Heywire within the broader field of youth and new media in order to investigate the challenges encountered as the project's facilitators sought to define its relevance and position Heywire within a rich and varied media ecology. Facilitators' approach to the Heywire website broadly reflect dominant attitudes towards young people and new, digital technologies. In particular, claims about the features and usefulness of the Heywire website closely mirror the cautionary and celebratory binary that is evident in both popular and academic approaches to young people and technology. As this section will demonstrate, Heywire is quite unlike social media, YouTube, and the other sorts of new media that young people use on a regular basis, and that are most frequently discussed in the mainstream media and the academic literature in this field. However, discussing this literature helps demonstrate the ways in which Heywire is unique from other media. Furthermore, the wider debates and ideas about young people's interactions with new, digital technologies are relevant to this research since the Heywire website was created within this context, and this is the broader ecology of media that it endeavours to fit within.

Children and young people's use of new, digital media constitutes an ever increasing volume of research which both celebrates and laments the possibilities new technologies pose for young people's social interactions, public participation, learning, and identity work and play. In the broader field of media studies young people have attracted particular scholarly interest since, unlike previous generations, today's children and teenagers are growing up in a world where new media technologies are a taken-for-granted part of everyday life (Ito et al. 2010, xi; Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013, 28). For this group, processes of identity, communication and socialising, self-expression, and

engagement with culture and politics are augmented by new media technologies, or entirely played out in mediated environments such as social media and the internet. Hence, young people are frequently labelled the 'internet generation', 'generation i', and many similar nicknames (Herring in Buckingham 2008, 71; Buckingham and Willet 2013, 1-2)⁶, and they are frequently the focus of research that investigates ways in which new media shape humans' social life, personal development, learning, and participation in the public sphere.

As I will continue to demonstrate throughout this section, the Heywire website is generically different from the forms of new media that are most commonly discussed in youth and new media scholarship, and unlike the media most commonly associated with young people, such as YouTube, Facebook or gaming (Ito et al. 2010, 11), and that youth use as part of their day to day lives. For example, Heywire is not a website that young people use on a regular basis or for regular activities such as communicating with friends. As such, it is not an online space that is "entangled with" (Gray 2009, 16) or an extension of young people's offline worlds in the same way that media such as social network sites are (boyd in Ito et al. 2010, 84-85). Heywire exists in a large and varied ecology of media and it is just one of many sites in which young people participate. Yet, in a networked, convergent media ecology (Horst, Herr-Stephenson and Robinson in Ito et al. 2010, 30-31), it is necessary to consider any type of website or mediated environment intended for youth participation alongside and in relation to the numerous and varied forms of new media that young people commonly use.

Drawing from Mizuko Ito et al. (2010) I use the term 'new media' to refer to various kinds of interactive digital media that young people most commonly use for self-representation and voice, and are now associated with youth culture. According to Ito et al.

sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and LiveJournal and online gaming have a high degree of youth participation, and youth have defined certain genres of participation within these sites that are keyed to a generational identity (2010, 11).

New media evolves rapidly and sites such as Snapchat can now be added to this list. These sites and digital platforms are "interactive, digital, virtual, online, social, networked,

⁶ The idea that young people are digital natives has been widely critiqued (see for example Buckingham, Bragg and Kehily 2014, 10; Buckingham and Willet 2013); nonetheless, some scholars argue that it remains prevalent in discussions about youth and new media (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 191).

convergent” (Ito et al. 2010, 10); they are tools young people use for expressing and representing themselves and for communicating with others, as well as virtual spaces where they go to ‘hang out’ with their peers.

There are two main and opposing approaches to youth and new media which emerge in academic scholarship as well as mainstream media. On one hand new technologies such as social media and the internet are celebrated for providing young people with alternate, adult-free tools and spaces for communicating and socialising, for expressing their views, developing and representing their identities, and for doing all these things away from the usual structures that dominate their lives, such as school or family (Buckingham 2008, 5; Ito et al. 2010, 22-23). However, these and other celebratory claims are accompanied by numerous concerns and critiques about the implications new media have for young people’s privacy, safety, social development and learning (Buckingham 2008, 13; Gershon 2011, 999-1000). As David Buckingham writes, general assumptions about young people’s relations with technologies “frequently seem to veer between moral panics about the dangers of new media and an exaggerated romanticism about their liberating potential” (2008, 5). Young people are seen as a vulnerable group for whom the internet poses numerous threats, yet, at the same time, they are viewed as highly ‘media-savvy’ ‘digital natives’ for whom the internet is a space of liberation and empowerment (Herring in Buckingham 2008, 73-75; Livingstone 2009, 16; Gershon 2011, 999).

Researchers such as Sonia Livingstone (2009, 16), Nancy Baym (2010, 41-44) and Susan Herring (in Buckingham 2008, 71-76) also acknowledge these conflicting approaches to young people’s media use. According to Herring (in Buckingham 2008), both the positive and negative claims reflect adults’ construction of youth and new media, rather than the perspectives of young people themselves. Further, Herring’s analysis suggests that the celebratory versus fearful distinction has emerged in the constructions of youth and new media produced by researchers in opposition to those pervasive in the mainstream media. She writes:

the mainstream media often represent young media users as vulnerable and in need of societal protection and direction. To a considerable extent, this discourse reflects what journalists perceive as the concerns of parents and educators about children who spend time on the Internet and the World Wide Web (Herring in Buckingham 2008, 74).

Conversely, Herring finds youth and new media research tends to over-celebrate the interesting affordances of new, digital technologies and exoticise young people’s media use

as highly novel, and radically different from what came before (ibid, 75). This gives rise to the discourse of 'digital youth' and the 'Net Generation' which suggests youth are different sorts of people from their predecessors (Herring in Buckingham 2008, 75-76). Their identities are entirely linked to new technologies (ibid). Both these views are adult constructions which, according to Herring, "reflect adult "fantasies" rather than youth "realities"" (in Buckingham 2008, 82). Herring consequently urges a perspectival shift where less focus is given to technologies and more to the young people themselves (ibid, 86-87). Such a shift means considering the technology is only interesting in terms of the way it is used. It means focussing on the ways young people are using technologies and the positive and negative aspects of this usage, rather than theorising ways in which the inherent features of the technologies produce either good or bad consequences.

A social approach to new media research

Much youth and new media scholarship, especially the more recent work, does indeed focus on the human rather than technological aspects of young people's interactions with new media. For example, the large number of ethnographies that have been produced about young people's use of new media indicate a widespread, human, sociocultural approach to youth and new media research. Researchers investigate young people's use of new technologies in the context of broader social and cultural patterns, arguing that media and technology are "embodiments of social and cultural relationships" rather than entities or platforms that create effects or prompt actions that are entirely distinct from young people's daily 'unmediated' lives (Ito et al. 2010, 4-5). For example, in *Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out*, Ito et al. (2010) present numerous case studies that depict young people's media use in diverse settings including school, the family home, as well as in particular mediated environments such as social networks sites and online gaming. These cases contextualise young people's new media use as embedded in existing social, cultural, and place-based structures. From this perspective, offline or everyday structures are seen as inevitably feeding into online, mediated practices which in turn shape offline actions, expressions and experiences (Ito et al. 2010, 4).

Mary Gray's ethnography of rural American youth's use of media for negotiating identity and queer visibility demonstrates a similar approach. In *Out in the Country* (2009) Gray avoids making clear distinctions between online and offline worlds and practices, or questioning how new media might create new, liberatory spaces for young people to

express stigmatised identities; rather, she argues that young people's engagement with new media is far more complicated than these simple distinctions suggest. Hence, a more useful approach was to de-centre media as the object of analysis and instead "contextualize media engagements as part of a broader social terrain of experience" (Gray 2009, 14). In line with Ito et al. (2010), for Gray this meant acknowledging new media technologies as embedded within "the broader social conditions of rural life—most notably the dynamics of class, gender, race and location" (Gray 2009, 15). These factors affect and lend meaning to new media use: who use it, how, and for what purpose. Gray's work suggests that considering new media as 'embedded' in this way complicates celebratory notions that it is an inherent quality of new technologies to lead to completely new identities or liberate young people by providing them with new spaces for escaping their surroundings (Gray 2009, 15). Instead, as Baym (2010) argues, the consequences, either positive or negative, of technologies "arise from a mix of "affordances" – the social capabilities technological qualities enable – and the unexpected and emergent ways that people make use of those affordances" (Baym 2010, 44). This suggests that new media cannot be understood as harbouring positive or grievous potentials for youth simply because of the particular features of the technology itself; rather, as Baym points out, these potentials arise in a more complex technology-society relationship.

What emerges in the approaches to new media research that Ito et al. (2010), Gray (2009) and Baym (2010) discuss is a dismissal of a 'media effects' perspective in which the technology is seen to be the root cause of either dangerous or liberatory changes, in favour of a sociocultural understanding of new media that recognises "technologies reflect, reproduce, and are embedded within" the structures and norms of a given society (Gray 2009, 16). Buckingham and Mary Jane Kehily (in Buckingham, Bragg and Kehily 2014, 10) make a related point through their wariness of both technological determinism and an exoticising view of young people. They insist that young people's online activities are for the most part neither spectacular or glamorous, but rather fairly mundane and banal:

It may well be that much of what they are doing online is simply a displacement or an extension of what previous generations were doing offline; and it may well be that the distinction between online and offline is rapidly becoming meaningless (Buckingham, Bragg and Kehily 2014, 10).

Rather than focussing on causal assumptions about the potentials and possibilities afforded by the very existence of new technologies, this sort of research concentrates on the ways people use, manipulate and transform them to fulfil their own purposes. New media are

revealed as entirely integrated in the everyday lives of youth; they mirror and expand embodied or face to face experiences (Gray 2009, 15; boyd in Ito et al. 2010, 84) and are fundamentally connected to the production and expression of all identities in their various forms (Gray 2009, 17).

Accepting new media as interconnected with unmediated, embodied practices means moving beyond technological deterministic views that it is the characteristics of the technology that produce either positive or negative effects (Baym 2010, 27), and towards an approach which sees new media as socially shaped and, in many cases, domesticated. Baym describes that from this perspective, the affordances and capabilities that technologies enable – in addition to the ways people make use of, accept, reject, repurpose and invest meaning in these – influence the further development and use of technology (Baym 2010, 44-45). The positive and negative consequences of new media therefore emerge through a symbiotic relationship between the technology and the people who use it. This approach to new media questions the rhetoric around the good and evil of digital technologies by focusing more on the specific ways people adopt particular forms of new media, reject others, and integrate some into their everyday lives. Both the positive and the negative implications of technologies are still widely debated, although these discussions are mostly framed around the sorts of practices that emerge through the use of digital technologies and new media, rather than purely in terms of the empowering or constraining possibilities caused by inherent features of technologies. The celebratory, cautionary dichotomy is hence still very clear in attitudes towards youth and new media despite the social approach taken in youth and new media research.

Cautionary approaches

Despite some widespread, celebratory views about technological affordances, children and young people's engagement with technology tends to be publicly regarded with both dismay and panic. Cautionary tales about the dangers of the internet frequently emerge in the mainstream media, seemingly reflecting the fears parents, educators and governments have towards youth's media use (Livingstone 2009, 92). According to Livingstone,

With headlines full of paedophiles, 'internet sex beasts', cyber-bullies and online suicide pacts easily predominating over positive stories of the educational, civic or expressive dimensions of internet use, it is perhaps unsurprising that public anxiety regarding risk in relation to children and the

internet is considerable, at times resulting in disproportionate reactions to perceived threats (Livingstone 2009, 151).

In Australia, concerns over cyberbullying, sexting, and young people's overuse of digital technologies such as smartphones and video games have for years been recurrent topics in print and online news media. Over several months between late 2013 to early 2014 concerns such as these seemed particularly pervasive. Countless headlines reported that Australian State Governments were legislating to "crack down on malicious sexting" (Tomazin 2013); politicians and educators were advocating for technology-free days in a movement against cyberbullying (Hurst 2014); and journalists reported numerous statistics with implied or explicitly negative connotations. For instance, ABC Radio's current affairs program *AM* reported: "When hormones and young love collide with this technology [smartphones] the results can be alarming. Nearly 20 per cent of teens have admitted sending or receiving naked images of themselves" (Hamann 2013).

Reports such as these are frequent and pervasive in the mainstream media, and by focussing on the real or perceived risks of new technologies they either ignore or diminish accounts of the ways in which new media are useful to young people. For instance, as reported on ABC Local Radio in March 2014, "[s]ocial media has increased the risks for young people with the chances of shaming and cyber bullying adding to the already obvious pressures of school life" (Bevan 2014). The following month *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter Andrew Masterson wrote "[t]echnically, the kids are all right" and reported research findings by danah boyd and the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) that indicate new media is not dangerous in the ways that Government policies and news headlines suggest (Masterson 2014). Masterson noted that boyd and ACMA's findings "seem at odds with the frequent headlines and policy announcements about the dangers of social media" (Masterson 2014), yet the article still perpetuates attitudes common in mainstream media's approach to the subject of youth and technology by concluding that adults will always be concerned about youth's media use, and that young people are 'addicted' to digital technologies. For example, Masterson wrote that for adults, fears about "bogeymen on Facebook" will persist, "[a]nd for the teenagers themselves, access to digital devices is more than just an option. It is essential" (Masterson 2014).

In line with Livingstone's argument, the mainstream media, educators, parents and politicians tend to associate young people's use of new, digital technologies and the internet with dangers such as cyberbullying, or with a concern that by engaging with technologies like social media, youth are disengaging from 'real life'. In March 2014, for

example, Australian politician Bill Shorten expressed his support for a ‘Digital Detox’ initiative, encouraging all Australians to avoid using digital technology and the internet for 48 hours (Hurst 2014). Similar initiatives have been implemented in various other parts of the world; for instance, the Digital Detox organisation in Oakland, California (<http://thedigitaldetox.org/>) offers ‘device-free’ retreats and urges people to ‘disconnect to reconnect’ and ‘create balance in the digital age’. In Australia, the “48 hour digital detox” was initiated as part of a ‘National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence’ (Hurst 2014). *The Guardian* described Shorten’s concerns that “the advent of Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat and Instagram meant children were not safe from the scourge of cyberbullying at home” (ibid).

Of course, stories about the dangers of new, digital media and public fears of how they might be misused exist alongside numerous hopeful anticipations. As Livingstone writes,

Great expectations abound regarding children and the internet ... The fears may dominate the newspaper headlines, and they are readily expressed by parents, teachers and children themselves. But it is the great expectations that are driving internet adoption and use at the level of government policy, commercial enterprise, community provision and domestic consumption (Livingstone 2009, 28).

This is clear in the Australian context. While concerns about the risks of new media and technology’s impact upon childhood and youth might appear to be the major preoccupation of politicians, parents and educators, technology’s strongest advocates include Government departments, and youth and education sectors.

The Foundation for Young Australians (fya), for instance, finds that information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a vital role in engaging or re-engaging young people who are disadvantaged or ‘at risk’ from educational disengagement (Walsh et al. 2011, 1). Additionally, the Australian Government’s Department of Education has a strong and long-term commitment to integrating ICTs into Australia’s education system and in 2008 initiated the ‘Digital Education Revolution’ program (DER). An independent Mid-Program Review of the DER published in 2013 describes:

The initiative involved investment in computers and software, school-based infrastructure, leadership, professional development and digital resources across all Australian education systems and sectors. The objective of the DER was to create ubiquitous access to the tools necessary for students to take advantage of new technologies (DEEWR 2013, 4).

The Review determined that the DER was “broadly regarded as a major success” amongst stakeholders who included teachers, educational authorities, students, and the Department of Education. That “general acknowledgment now exists across Australian education sectors that digital technology leads to enhanced educational outcomes” was identified as a significant outcome of the program (DEEWR 2013, 5).

Such a contradictory mix of negative stories and positive anticipations is not uncommon in attitudes towards technologies, both old and new, and it is evidently not unique to the Australian context. Baym (2010) along with other prominent new media researchers including Buckingham (2008, 11) acknowledge that the current conflicting attitudes towards new, digital technologies mirror the combination of fear and enthusiasm that surrounded other ‘old’ technologies in the past. Discussing conflicting predictions and claims made about a variety of new media such as the internet, and older technologies including telephone, radio and television, Baym indicates that all technologies have been met with a complex mix of positive and negative expectations, especially when they are new (Baym 2010, 26-38): “Predictable negative stories are met with predictable positive alternatives in a familiar contradictory binary” (ibid, 27). While this binary is ‘familiar’ and widely noted in new media scholarship, it is of interest in this research because both sides of the debate are evident in the ABC’s approach to the Heywire website.

Celebratory perspectives

By and large, the research that takes a positive approach towards young people’s use of various forms of digital technology proposes that new media are not only a seamless but highly useful part of young people’s lives. There is abundant scholarship that demonstrates a celebratory perspective by revealing numerous reasons and diverse contexts in which young people’s interactions with new media can be viewed as highly beneficial and rewarding activities. Despite varying frameworks and the different contexts represented, there are several areas of discussion that appear prevalent in this research: identity and self-representation, communication, participation, and learning. These areas are not mutually-exclusive but rather cross over, feed into one another, and are bound by a number of broad themes the most common of which include changing power-relations, youth empowerment, agency and autonomy.

New media offer a variety of places, platforms and tools for communication, creative production, self-representation and self-expression. For minority groups and individuals who have traditionally had limited means to represent their own identities and make their voices heard – such as young people – the opportunities afforded by new, digital technologies are especially significant. According to Buckingham, digital media represent an emerging power shift and this is particularly important to children and youth (2008, ix). Young people have “historically been subject to a high degree of systematic and institutional control in the kinds of information and social communication to which they have access” (Buckingham 2008, ix). Technologies, however, facilitate new forms of communication, and provide young people with avenues for identity formation, learning, playing, and socialisation that are not reliant on adult oversight or guidance, or governed by the dominant authorities in their lives (Ito et al. 2010, 22-23).

For these reasons, new media have often been celebrated as sites of liberation and a means of empowerment for young people (Buckingham 2008, 13). Much youth and new media research argues that online, via social media, or through their use of devices such as cameras and smartphones, young people access alternate spaces in which they can “make their voices heard by a wider audience” (Buckingham 2008, 5), construct their own identities, and “create themselves as thoughtful and powerful participants” (Goldman, Booker and McDermott in Buckingham 2008, 200). On the internet, young people can be seen to be using the technology with more prowess than older generations (Livingstone 2009, 2; Ito et al. 2010, 14), hence demonstrating competence and suggesting that they, and not adults, are in control (Goldman, Booker and McDermott in Buckingham 2008, 200). As such, new media appear to offer tools and spaces in which young people can “practice their agency” (ibid), represent themselves as experts, and exercise control over expressions of youth concerns and constructions of their own identities.

Furthermore, the participatory qualities of these media are emphasised and lauded since they enable young people to actively engage as creators and producers of media content, rather than merely as passive consumers. According to Patricia Lange and Ito (in Ito et al. 2010, 247), media educators are increasingly embracing programs that emphasise media production, motivated by the belief that self-expression through creative content creation will lead to youth empowerment:

These educators believe that shifting youth identity from that of media consumer to a media producer is an important vehicle for developing youth

voice, creativity, agency, and new forms of literacy in a media-saturated era (Lange and Ito in Ito et al. 2010, 247).

Lange and Ito acknowledge a tension between adult authority and youth autonomy in school-based media literacy programs and suggest that young people's recreational content creation results in different, though highly active, peer-based and self-driven forms of learning that are potentially more validating (ibid, 249-250). Media production or the "wide range of practices that might fall under the umbrella of "online content creation"" are increasingly central in young people's everyday social communication (Lange and Ito in Ito et al. 2010, 290). The processes of creating and sharing their own content are important as a means of self-expression, as practices through which youth gain visibility and validation for their work, and a means of connecting with others in "communities of interest" (ibid, 290-291).

Ideas such as those I have discussed so far in this section are increasingly criticised for over-celebrating the liberatory possibilities of digital media, and overemphasising young people's agency and autonomy (see for example Thornham and McFarlane 2014; Willet in Buckingham 2008). Much recent research is wary of idealising technological affordances, or exoticising young people's use of new media, yet numerous popular and academic accounts of young people's interactions with new technologies continue to demonstrate the usefulness of new, digital media in various aspects of young people's lives. For example, Mirosław Filiciak et al. (2013) argue new communication technologies intensify certain processes to do with self-presentation, individualisation and "being yourself" – processes that are especially important to youth (Jacyno in Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013, 87-88). These authors, along with Suvi Uski and Airi Lampinen (2014) argue that the presentation of an 'authentic self' is important to young people and that the presentation of authenticity requires a greater deal of effort in mediated environments such as social network sites than in face to face interactions (Uski and Lampinen 2014, 16). The conscious and ongoing choice-making processes that are required in online self-presentation prompt a high degree of self-reflection and encourage youth to continually reevaluate their own self-concept. Such activities are intensely self-reflexive and thus encourage personal growth (Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013, 74).

Many of the optimistic visions about the power of technology to give voice and visibility to unseen and underrepresented groups are evident in the principles that have been core to the Heywire project since it was initiated in 1998 as a purely radio-based storytelling project. The ABC has always professed that Heywire gives rural and regional

youth a voice in their own communities and an opportunity to “communicate to a large audience the challenges, concerns, ideas and what it is like to be a young person in rural, regional and remote Australia” (McKenzie and James 2003, vii). By inviting young people to submit short, true stories about their lives to the annual Heywire competition, then broadcasting the winning stories, performed by the storytellers themselves, on ABC Local Radio throughout rural and regional Australia, the ABC aimed to provide an opportunity for young people to articulate their ideas and represent their lives, as well as space in the ABC’s programming where their voices could be listened to across the nation.

Furthermore, the numerous, often lofty assertions applied to the ‘Heywire Blog’ from 2008 reflect numerous of these celebratory themes, either explicitly or implicitly, and echo the optimism that permeates much youth and new media research. For example, the idea that new media and the internet can disrupt existing power relations by enabling marginal groups and unheard individuals to gain greater visibility and voice (Buckingham 2008, ix) was a core objective of the Heywire website. As a platform that enabled young people from regional areas to share their personal stories with each other and the broader Australian public, the website enabled youth to represent their own lives and “be the authors of their own identities” (Heywire 2011).

The commonalities between the ABC’s initial visions for Heywire as an ABC Radio project and the discourses of voice and empowerment that permeate celebratory discussions of youth and new, digital technologies appear on one hand fairly coincidental: the ABC looked to empower young people, and, according to much research, new media are sites in which young people exert agency and control. On the other hand, it could be argued that the ABC’s high hopes for the empowering and voice-giving abilities of the Heywire project reflect the ways all technologies are, to some extent, over-celebrated or feared (Baym 2010, 27-28). The initial aspirations for the Heywire website and the numerous, sometimes conflicting claims the ABC made about its affordances indicates that the ABC’s approach leaned towards “an exaggerated romanticism” (Buckingham 2008, 5) and “utopian visions” (Baym 2010, 28).

Despite this, the ABC’s approach to the Heywire website and their assertions about its functions also reflect many of the concerns about the dangers of new technologies. Some common anxieties associated with young people’s use of the internet are embedded in the website’s structure, evident in the way the ABC aimed to appease parents’ and

adults' concerns by making the Heywire website a 'safe' space for young people's creative production, self-expression and communication.

The implication that adults are concerned about young people's safety online – and that they need not worry about the Heywire website – was made explicit in a 2008 ABC Radio interview with then Heywire Producer Bryce Ives. At the time of the interview, the website was a new addition to the Heywire project. The objective of the interview was clearly to allow the ABC to promote the new Heywire website and describe the affordances that rendered it unique in comparison to the numerous other online environments that young people in Australia were already using. The interview was also shared on the Heywire website as an audio file entitled *A Little Heywire Plug* (Ives 2008). During the interview, Ives comments that parents and teachers are indeed concerned about what their children are doing online. Countering this, he states:

The great thing about the Heywire space is that it's part of the ABC. It's part of a space that allows young people their freedom to create and express but to do so in a safe and moderated environment. So really, you can rest assured that that space is being managed by, you know, staff members who are here in Australia, who can support the young people who are in the Heywire space, rather than it being a space which is unmoderated or uncontrolled (Ives 2008).

Moderation of ABC websites such as Heywire, online forums, and any space that invites user-generated content or feedback is important for upholding the integrity of the ABC (ABC 2011b). In the case of Heywire, though, the ABC proposed that their close monitoring and management was a major advantage of the website since it guaranteed Heywire was a 'safe space', free of dangers such as cyberbullying. As stated in the *Heywire Resource Guide* (Sadov 2009):

One of the main ongoing issues with online or virtual communities is of course safety, and this is particularly important to youth in our community as they can be particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and offensive or inappropriate content.

Enter Heywire: Heywire is a safe online community which is closely managed and moderated by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. All content is closely scrutinised, so there is no risk of 'hate mail' aimed at social groups or any content of an inappropriate or offensive nature. Of course, within reason everybody has a right to their say, but Heywire is committed to the idea that content must have a positive intent (Sadov 2009, 9).

Demonstrating to parents and teachers that Heywire is a safe space for young people's self-expression and "an opportunity for your students to be honest about their lives in regional and rural Australia" (Heywire 2014b) remains important to the Heywire project. In addition to such reassurances, the ABC also promote the project as central to young people's learning and development of skills, claiming: "English, Media, SOSE and Art teachers around the nation use Heywire as a 'real life' task for students exploring issues such as: identity, place, journeys, discovery or belonging; or in any unit that involves producing personal narratives" (Heywire 2014b). Heywire's collaboration with the Australian Teachers Of Media (ATOM) and creation of the *Heywire Resource Guide* (Sadov 2009), and more recently the *Heywire Secondary Teaching Notes* produced by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE 2011) are indicative of their attempts to position Heywire in Australian schools. In addition, the 'Teachers' page on the Heywire website, and the hyperlinks to ABC Splash⁷, are designed to inform high school teachers, encourage them to "Put Heywire in your curriculum!" (Heywire 2014b), and provide age-appropriate activities that will help teachers integrate Heywire storytelling in classrooms.

New media, new possibilities

The creation of the 'Heywire Blog' in 2008 bolstered the project's original aims around voice and self-representation and also enabled the visions and objectives for Heywire to be expanded. For example, the ABC claimed that via new media technologies and the internet, Heywire could offer young people a safe space in which to connect with each other, network, and form community (Sadov 2009). These claims were in addition to the Heywire project's original aims to facilitate voice through providing a platform for self-representational storytelling.

After the creation of the Heywire website, notions of community, networking and interaction emerged as prominent new themes. In the ABC's 2008 interview with past Producer Bryce Ives, Ives articulates the ABC's new visions for the project. The interview

⁷ ABC Splash is an Australian Government initiative, and a collaboration between Education Services Australia and the ABC which aims "to bring teachers, school-aged children and their parents engaging learning resources, all mapped to the Australian Curriculum" (<http://splash.abc.net.au/home>).

reveals clear changes in the ABC's thinking around Heywire from the perspective of one of the project's managers. Most notable in the following is the distinct desire for Heywire to be a media-rich, interactive space for discussion and debate. Ives says:

So on the Heywire site now, you can see videos, you can listen to audio, you can read words that have come from young people across rural and regional Australia. And if you're a young person as well you can network with other young people from your area or from other areas ... you can share your thoughts and ideas, aspirations, um, anything really to do with your life. And it's all about authentic and real voices as well, so Heywire's not a short storytelling competition or a short film competition; it's about real stories and real perspectives from rural and regional Australia ... It's a forum for any kind of discussion... Really it's a space to create, discuss, debate, and be yourself (Ives 2008).

Ives's choice of words indicates the competition aspect of Heywire was now secondary to Heywire's potential as an interactive network and online community. This is interesting because it is a notion that is entirely contradictory to all the other research discussed in this thesis. As I describe in chapter three, that Heywire is a competition is fundamental to the project's structure and of central importance to the ABC. Yet, from Ives's interview it can be deduced that Heywire producers intended for the Heywire website to lift the project beyond its humble origins as a radio-based storytelling competition and transform it into a space in which rural and regional youth could converse and find community together.

The ABC's initial aspirations for the Heywire Blog are described at length in a 2009 *Heywire Resource Guide* which was compiled by Heywire staff in collaboration with the Australia Teachers of Media (ATOM). The *Resource Guide* describes "[i]n some ways Heywire is similar to Facebook or YouTube. It's an ABC space used to create an online community – but Heywire is a lot more" (Sadov 2009, 3). This document states that Heywire's focus is still young people's stories, yet, reflecting Ives's interview, it also describes numerous other affordances that are related purely to new technologies and the project's website, and have no relation at all to the original aims of the project. For example, amongst Heywire's original and most fundamental objectives is the aim to provide a cohort whose voices are not easily heard, and whose concerns are rarely considered or acknowledged, (McKenzie and James 2003) with a platform from which to represent their lives and express their views. According to the *Resource Guide*, though, the Heywire website enables young people to connect with like-minded peers and "interact freely" in a "safe and protected space" (Sadov 2009, 3). These claims mark a significant shift in how the ABC envisioned the project. Essentially, by incorporating new media, a complex,

contradictory combination of new possibilities and new themes were integrated into the ABC's objectives for Heywire.

Despite the ABC's claims, the Heywire website never looked like YouTube or a social network site, provided the same functions, nor enabled the same kind of participation. However, it is clear that in their creation of the Heywire Blog the ABC attempted to give it similar qualities to the sites young people were already using: from 2008 until July 2014 the website invited young people to become Heywire members via 'ABC Communities' and create a username and password; next, Heywire members personalised a profile page through uploading a profile picture, and introduced themselves in an 'About Me' section on the page which prompted the member to "tell us a little bit about yourself". Generally, members stated their age, where they were from, and described their hobbies and what they hoped to do in the future. The website also included a comment function so that users could respond to other people's stories. In keeping with the project's original aims, the website specifically asked young people to create and share true stories about their lives in rural, regional or remote Australia. While in the past stories were confined to a short piece that could be performed on-air, the website invited content in the form of videos, photographs, text and audio. The most recent story contributions were listed on the website's homepage, and until mid-2014 there were nearly 500 other pages of stories dating back to August 2008.

Aspects of the website's appearance and functionality did initially resemble that of a blog. Blogs can be defined as "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Stern in Buckingham 2008, 98). Young people were encouraged to use the Heywire website as they might a personal blog, regularly sharing text stories, photographs, short videos and any other media they chose. On the Heywire website, visitors to the site could find news articles written by ABC staff and Heywire producers; several tabs providing information about the Heywire project, and then young people's stories listed from the bottom half of the homepage.



Figure 3: Heywire Blog, May 2014

The website is of course an ABC managed and heavily moderated space. It is a pre-made platform that invites youth participation and it is therefore unlike *personal* blogs or webpages that young people create for themselves. Hence it is arguably not a “youth controlled space” (Goldman, Booker and McDermott in Buckingham 2008, 200) where young people make all their own decisions about self-representation and self-expression. It does not allow for the high level of design and personalisation that youth can enjoy on pages they have created for themselves, and the subjects that one may depict and write about are far more limited.

While the ABC proclaimed the fact the Heywire Blog was an ABC managed, closely moderated space as a highly positive aspect of the site (Sadov 2009, 3, 5; Heywire 2011; Ives 2008), these factors are not likely to be conducive to young people’s forming of close bonds or establishing new friendships. The ABC states that “[b]est of all”, the ABC’s management of Heywire means the website is “a safe and protected space – a space for young people to interact freely” (Sadov 2009, 3). This particular statement is a contradiction in terms: it indicates that Heywire is heavily moderated, and yet also claims it is a space in which youth can act in ways entirely of their own choosing. Honest, ‘free’ or uninhibited self-expression and self-representation have always been of key value to the Heywire project, and the ABC evidently intended the website would bolster this. The ABC

envisaged that Heywire could be a dynamic space of discussion and debate and “create a shared conversation amongst young people in rural and regional Australia” (Sadov 2009, 3). However, ideas of free interaction and self-expression are at odds with the ideas of institutional management and website moderation. A website that is closely monitored and overtly managed seems unlikely to attract youth participation, prompt discussion or effectively support their interaction.

One of the ways in which new media is attractive to young people is that these technologies offer a sense of control, independence, and an escape from adult surveillance. While claims that the internet provides spaces in which youth can interact freely, express their views, and represent their identities in ways entirely of their own choosing are heavily contested⁸, a number of youth and new media researchers argue that mediated environments such as the internet enable young people to “claim “spaces” that escape adult control” (Buckingham 2008, 5), and offer an experience of autonomy, however illusory this may be (ibid, 17). boyd, for example, argues that the power adults hold over young people “is the root of why teenagers are on MySpace in the first place” (in Buckingham 2008, 134). Writing from a US perspective, boyd explains that young people’s lives are highly structured, regulated and increasingly monitored and restricted (boyd in Buckingham 2008, 134-135; boyd in Ito et al. 2010, 80). However, social network sites provide young people with a way to “participate in unregulated publics while located in adult-regulated physical spaces such as homes and schools” (boyd in Buckingham 2008, 136). Such is the appeal and one of the highly useful affordances of these technologies for youth. This research indicates that a key reason for young people’s gathering online is that sites such as social networks provide a sense of autonomy and freedom. While this sense of freedom and independence may be illusory, it is still a key motivation for young people whose access to offline, physical spaces for socialisation is limited.

The capability for new media and the internet to allow young people to interact with each other in spite of physical boundaries is particularly relevant to young people living in

⁸ See, for example, Rebekah Willet (in Buckingham 2008) and Susannah Stern (same volume) who argue that the notion the internet is a ‘free’ and ‘open’ environment for self-expression, self-representation and interaction is actually illusory. For instance, Willet warns against over-celebrating young people’s agency online, stating “we might want to question the portrayal of the Internet as a completely open democratic space in which children navigate freely” (in Buckingham 2008, 54).

rural, regional and remote Australia. Many individuals within the youth cohort that the Heywire project seeks to engage live in rural towns or on isolated properties across Australia; they are geographically isolated from one another and have fewer opportunities for face to face interaction and socialisation with friends and peers than their city counterparts. The possibilities that new, digital technologies encompass in terms of social interaction and self-expression are therefore particularly important to this group. However, it would seem that Heywire, by its very nature as an ABC project and closely monitored website, has never been conducive to supporting the sort of expression that might occur between friends on Facebook, nor been particularly effective in supporting young people's interaction.

It is clear that the ABC's visions for the Heywire website are continually shifting as the project's producers respond to the ways this platform is or is not being used by youth, and continually endeavour to define its relevance in an evolving media landscape. This can be seen in the various ways the ABC have described and promoted Heywire over the years, as well the alterations that have been made to the website, in particular the significant reworking of Heywire's online space that occurred in July 2014, the nature of which is discussed in chapter three. Furthermore, the *Heywire Resource Guide* referred to earlier has not been available for download from the Heywire website since 2013, presumably because the objectives for the website have altered over the years and this document no longer reflects facilitators' concept of how this platform is useful to rural and regional youth. The *Resource Guide* was replaced by the *Heywire Secondary Teaching Notes* (VATE 2011).

The differences between these two documents demonstrate the shift in the ABC's objectives. For example, while notions of community, interaction and connection are very prominent themes in the *Resource Guide* (Sadov 2009), there is a marked absence of words such as community, networking and interaction in the more recent *Heywire Secondary Teaching Notes* (VATE 2011). This reveals that the project's producers are very aware of the website's limitations in these areas and shows they are now placing more emphasis on other aspects of the project. As will be further discussed in the following chapter, the Heywire website's limitations in terms of interactivity and community do not necessarily suggest a failing on the part of the project; it is only further evidence of Heywire's difference from other platforms.

Conclusions

This chapter has positioned the Heywire project at the intersection of public service media, digital storytelling, and youth and new media. Each section has sought to progressively illuminate the nature of the Heywire project through situating it within each of these fields. Further, by discussing the core issues and contemporary debates for PSM, digital storytelling and youth and new media, this chapter has shown the sorts of challenges and opportunities that a project such as Heywire poses for its managing institution as well as its participants. As such, this chapter has explored the question: what are the potentials and limitations of personal narrative and digital technologies for achieving meaningful participation in the PSM context?

Through briefly tracking the ABC's history and the objectives and obligations of this institution, it is clear that the provision of online and digital media services and incorporating user-generated content are contemporary priorities for the ABC, and an important way through which PSM defines its role and relevance in the current, fully digitised media era. This is supported by academic literature that discusses the digital reinvention that is occurring within PSM institutions and suggests that participation must now be a key part of the public service remit. Heywire aligns with the ABC's commitment to providing services to rural and regional people and minority audiences and also the broadcaster's contemporary priorities around digital media and participation. However, this case study prompts a critical stance amid claims that PSM is "blurring the boundaries between producer and consumer" (Hutchinson 2012, 8-9) and establishing more democratic input in media decision-making (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 291). The case of Heywire necessitates the question: to what degree can PSM-managed projects be thought of as participatory? While PSM's inclusion of user-generated content such as personal narratives suggests increased opportunities for individual expression and self-representation, participation is unavoidably shaped, guided and delimited by the requirements of the institution.

The Heywire project clearly has ideals of participation and narrative self-representation at its heart, yet it appears structurally unsuited to enable young people to share stories, represent their lives, and author their identities in ways completely of their own choosing. As Thornham and McFarlane's (2014) research reminds us, the vast number of self-representational narratives on the Heywire website cannot necessarily be interpreted as evidence of autonomous creativity and individual expression; structures,

such as the precise visions for the Heywire project articulated on its website, along with broader institutional protocols and obligations, denote certain boundaries for storytelling, limiting the degree of agency and control youth may have on this platform. Such structures, likely inevitable in the PSM context, suggest that projects like Heywire can offer only a limited form of participation; however, such a form can still be meaningful for the institution as well as the participants. Opportunities to participate in PSM through projects like Heywire enable a greater diversity of people to take part in the creation and circulation of meanings. They represent an important shift within the mainstream media away from the dissemination of generalised and authoritative accounts of people's lives and identities towards a multiplicity of stories, voices, and more nuanced representations of societies.

The emergence of life storytelling projects such as Heywire in the context of public service media was in part prompted by the spread of digital storytelling and the changed culture of media production and consumption that this movement represented. The second section of this chapter situated Heywire as broadly part of the digital storytelling movement and described how the project was implicitly influenced by its principles and practices. Through comparing Heywire with a number of well-documented digital storytelling projects, the project can be seen to encompass some of the valuable affordances of narrative for engagement, to have the potential to facilitate voice for individuals who are underrepresented in the mainstream media, and provide them with a platform from which to represent their own lives, in their own voices. Digital storytelling and projects such as Heywire can be celebrated for facilitating the emergence of voices that have hitherto been unheard; however, 'listening' remains a challenge in these projects. As Dreher argues, achieving meaningful voice means attending to the processes and complexities of listening, as well as speaking (Dreher 2010, 98). This chapter's discussion of listening has suggested that Heywire's capacity to facilitate voice is likely greater than its aptitude for acknowledging the multiplicity of youth voices that it captures. These ideas are further considered and developed in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

Technological developments have prompted some questions around the continued relevance of facilitated participatory media practices such as digital storytelling, and likewise, of projects such as Heywire. In an era where young people in developed Western countries routinely use numerous media and online platforms for self-representation and self-expression, it has been necessary for Heywire to reimagine itself and adjust to the contemporary practices of its youth participants. The final part of this chapter contextualised Heywire within a broader media ecology to explore some of the challenges

this project has encountered as it has sought to sustain its relevance over a long period of time. The approach taken to Heywire's reinvention in 2008 and the new affordances the project's producers attributed to the new storytelling website indicate that it has been a struggle to reposition this project and define its uniqueness and usefulness in a highly dynamic, participatory media landscape. Such a "volatile" media landscape (Hutchinson 2012) also means that such struggles are frequent and ongoing: the Heywire website has been significantly restructured over the years and producers have reframed the project's purposes and aspirations, indicating the ABC's visions for the Heywire website are continually shifting as it endeavours to keep abreast of change.

Heywire remains unlike other media that young people commonly use for self-expression and self-representation, and it is not an example of a highly innovative platform for content creation and sharing. However, these features can be viewed as interesting advantages rather than failings; as a platform that specifically invites self-representational storytelling, Heywire is accessible to its users and it occupies a unique space in the contemporary media sphere. As a project embedded in the context of public service media, Heywire also reveals several things about content-related participation within PSM: storytelling does indeed offer an effective model through which PSM can engage non-media professionals as content creators, and it offers a highly user-friendly, potentially rewarding means of self-representation and self-expression for participants. Nonetheless, tensions are inevitable when inviting and broadcasting personal stories under the auspices of the PSM, with its attendant values around quality content and its various institutional conventions and obligations. The next chapter further unpacks these tensions through an in-depth analysis of the case study.

Chapter 3: The Platform

This chapter is an in-depth discussion and analysis of the Heywire project, its position within the ABC, its structure and facilitation. The question that guides this chapter is: in what ways do the multiple agendas of the institution intersect to create a genuine platform for participation? Having positioned this research within three key fields in chapter two, this chapter uses semi-structured interviews, organisational research and participant observation to examine Heywire at the level of the institution and to explore the precise ways in which participation is facilitated in this project. This research process highlights tensions on a structural level: the ABC has a rather ambitious, disparate suite of aims for Heywire, many of which conflict with each other and are antithetical to the aim to 'give voice' and provide a minority group with a platform for self-representation. While the principles of digital storytelling and notions of participation are clearly at the heart of Heywire, features inherent in the project's structure challenge some of these core values and objectives. Through outlining the project's position within the ABC, discussing the Corporation's visions for it, the interests of its various stakeholders and the nature of its management and funding structures, this chapter demonstrates the ways these pose some considerable challenges for the ABC as well as Heywire's rural and regional youth participants.

Research process

Heywire is a complex, multi-faceted project that comprises three distinct parts: it is an opportunity and platform for rural and regional youth to share personal narratives; it is a storytelling competition; and it is a politically-focussed Regional Youth Summit for about 40 winning storytellers each year. Multiple qualitative research methods enabled an investigation and analysis of these three aspects of Heywire, and the ways in which they each focus the project differently. I conducted semi-structured interviews with three ABC staff members involved in Heywire, including Executive Producer Dan Hirst, Online Producer Jonathan Atkins, and Justine McSweeney, a past ABC employee who was involved in Heywire's initiation in 1998 and who continues to attend the annual Heywire Regional Youth Summit. These interviews provide insights into the personal roles of these

individuals, how they understand Heywire's functions and purpose, and the personal aims and hopes they bring to the project.

Organisational research – that is, exploration of the wider institutional context in which Heywire fits, and analysis of how policies, organisational and departmental objectives and obligations shape the project's aims, functions and outcomes – reveals the complexities posed by Heywire's position within the ABC and its connections with the Australian Government. Analysis of multiple ABC policy documents, annual reports, and this institution's Act and Charter provide a view of the functions, obligations and protocols that underpin the broader ABC. Such research is contextually important, though it also provides specific insights into how Heywire fits within the institution. Furthermore, since Heywire is partnered with a number of Federal Government departments and has always relied on their sponsorship, I investigated these departments in order to determine how Heywire's Government stakeholders envisage the project, why they fund it, and the outcomes they expect the project will deliver. This research prompts questions about how effectively Heywire – as a project that comprises complex and competing institutional agendas and numerous stakeholders – can facilitate voice and self-representation in a way that acknowledges the value of the individual voice and story.

In February 2013 Dan Hirst invited me to attend the Heywire Regional Youth Summit in Canberra, providing me a valuable opportunity to observe this aspect of the project and gain an insight into the objectives and activities associated with this event. I went to Canberra for the last three days of the Summit, 'hung out' with the numerous ABC staff involved in the event, and with the 35 rural and regional competition winners. As a participant observer and researcher at the Heywire Summit, and a previous competition winner, I occupied a number of roles. While Hirst had invited me for research purposes, I was also a past competition winner and something of a mentor to that year's cohort of winners. As Michael Angrosino describes, I was perhaps a "participant-as-observer": a researcher more fully integrated into the group being studied and engaged with the people (Angrosino 2007, 55). I observed, asked questions, and made notes for inclusion in my thesis; I described my research to ABC staff and the youth participants and interviewed five Heywire winners, though I also took part in the Summit's various activities and offered my assistance to the participants as they busily prepared to make presentations in Parliament House.

Heywire's place and purpose within the ABC

As the national broadcaster, the ABC has a conscious commitment to providing services to non-metropolitan Australia and representing the viewpoints of people who live in rural and regional areas. Its obligations in this area are clearly reflected in the thinking that brought about Heywire's initiation in 1998, as well as the ABC's intentions for the project, and also evidenced in how the project is managed. Justine McSweeney, the first official coordinator of Heywire, describes how Heywire was developed in response to the Chairman of the ABC's decision to run a project that targeted rural and regional youth (interview, October 2012). Between 1994 and 1997, ABC Radio's Rural division ran the Rural Woman of the Year Award which celebrated the role of women in the primary industries (ibid; Henningham 2011). Then, in 1998, ABC Rural shifted their focus to youth and devised "the Heywire program" (ABC 2008a; McSweeney 2012).

The initiation of projects such as Heywire and the former Rural Woman of the Year Award clearly correspond with the overarching objectives of the ABC and obligations outlined in the Corporation's Charter, in particular, its obligations of social inclusion, and reflection and recognition of Australia's cultural diversity. The ABC's approach to representing cultural diversity and demonstrating social inclusion has been through acknowledging "special populations" which, according to Gay Hawkins, have "traditionally been 'women', 'rural' and 'children'" (Hawkins 2010, 291). Through Heywire, the ABC can be seen to be addressing two of its target groups simultaneously and providing these 'special categories' with programming that is distinctly tailored to them.

The usefulness of Heywire in fulfilling Charter obligations is also clear in an ABC report for the House of Representatives, in which the ABC lists its key strategies for "consciously increasing its commitment to rural and regional Australia" (ABC 2000, 3). The intentions to maintain a visible presence in regional locations, provide a vehicle for people's discussion and "avenues through which regional views and perspectives can be represented to wider audiences" (ABC 2000, 3) mirror claims that the ABC has made about Heywire and its intentions for the project. The close fit between aspirations for Heywire and the ABC's broader Charter obligations explains Heywire's initiation as well as its continued relevance within the ABC: through Heywire, the ABC can be seen to be meeting its objectives and demonstrating an enduring commitment to non-metropolitan Australians.

Since 1998, over 9,000 young people have submitted stories to the Heywire competition, and nearly 600 storytellers have attended the Summit in Canberra (Heywire 2015a). Through my involvement with Heywire – firstly as a storyteller, then an online producer, and more recently as a researcher – it is clear that the project has a reputation in rural areas for being a ‘vehicle’ for young people’s ideas, opinions and concerns, and an opportunity for them to represent themselves and their lives. However, elements of the platform’s structure impact upon Heywire’s successfulness in providing a space that acknowledges the diversity of voices and viewpoints of rural and regional youth, and the project’s usefulness for a large number of people.

Heywire fits within the Rural division of ABC Local Radio and is managed by two staff members – Hirst and Atkins – each of whom are from and report to different sectors of ABC Radio. Hirst is employed through ABC Rural and coordinates and manages the Heywire project in its entirety. Atkins is an ABC Radio Multiplatform employee, Heywire’s media manager, and the online producer who creates and manages web content across Heywire’s online platforms, including the website, the Heywire Facebook page, Twitter and tumblr.

ABC Rural and Multiplatform have specific roles and broadcast interests within ABC Radio, and, through Hirst and Atkins, both of these sets of objectives are brought to bear on Heywire. ABC Rural is a specialist department that produces news and entertainment programs designed to be of interest to people who live in rural and regional Australia (ABC 2011a). The reporters and producers from the ABC’s 51 regional radio stations become involved with Heywire to advertise the competition, judge entries, select their region’s winner and produce and broadcast their story. The departmental influence that ABC Rural brings to Heywire is an emphasis on topics and concerns that are of particular relevance to people who live in non-metropolitan Australia, as well as the wider broadcast of their voices and viewpoints.

ABC Multiplatform is a department that focuses on producing cross-media content for radio broadcast, online and ABC Television (ABC 2015d). From Atkins’s descriptions of his role within Heywire, it appears Multiplatform’s particular influence is in creating content for and managing Heywire’s online spaces; supporting young people to create multimedia content for entry into the Heywire competition through storytelling workshops; and professionally producing the stories of competition winners for radio broadcast and for online distribution (Atkins, interview, November 2012).

The support of a number of other ABC departments is important for the wider distribution of young people's stories. Hirst states that one of Heywire's aims is to support young people to have a voice on the ABC (interview, October 2012), and as indicated on the website, this includes multiple ABC platforms beyond the Heywire website and ABC Local Radio in rural areas. Hirst describes most projects within the ABC as being very collaborative and says Heywire crosses into, and receives support from a number of divisions within Radio including ABC Open and triple j. These other departments assist in two main ways: by advertising the Heywire competition and by producing the winners' stories for distribution across broadcast platforms including radio, online, and in the past ABC2 on Television. Advertising through several divisions is important for Heywire because they help it 'reach' into and become known in rural and regional areas as a storytelling competition and platform for young people's stories and ideas (Hirst, interview, October 2012). Furthermore, the assistance other departments provide in professionally producing and broadcasting winning Heywire stories is essential if the intention to increase the capacity for young people's stories to be acknowledged is to be fulfilled.

In many ways, Heywire appears to match the objectives and target audience of the other departments within ABC Radio that Hirst links it to, and it therefore seems logical for divisions such as triple j, ABC Open and Multiplatform to provide support. For example, triple j is the ABC's 'youth station' – a national music radio network which targets young people between the ages of 18 and 24 (ABC 2008b) – and it therefore seems an effective station on which to advertise the Heywire competition to regional youth. ABC Open is an initiative that produces and publishes local content from regional Australia, and encourages people from regional areas to contribute photographs, videos and share their experiences on the website (<https://open.abc.net.au/>) (ABC 2012b). ABC Open's focus on regional Australians creating and sharing their personal experiences and stories using digital media tools and the internet makes it seem particularly like Heywire, and Open producers assist Heywire by co-creating winners' narratives as audio-visual stories that are suitable for broadcast on radio and the ABC's numerous online platforms.

Reinventing Radio

Processes of producing Heywire stories for distribution across a number of different platforms is representative of the cross-media approach the ABC takes to radio content. While in the past only a small number of Heywire stories were delivered to ABC audiences

via Local Radio, the project has been expanded through its website, use of social media, and its collaboration with other ABC departments. The ABC now augments all its radio programs and projects with online resources, social media, and, in some cases, through live performances, and by broadcasting content from Radio projects on television⁹. Expansion across multiple broadcast platforms is an example of ways public radio is adapting to changing media landscapes and embracing people's increasingly active media habits (Edmond 2014). As Maura Edmond points out, "[r]adio, like every other medium, is experimenting with ever more complex cross-media practices" (2014, 2). At the ABC, newer projects such as ABC Open and *Now Hear This*, a live life-storytelling event broadcast on ABC Radio National, exemplify what Edmond describes as a "distinctly radio-born approach to new media content and cultures" (Edmond 2014, 14). They are forms of "expanded radio" which bolster their regular broadcasts by distributing content via multiple media and platforms, by encouraging audiences to move between these in order to interact with the content, and also to contribute and help curate it (Edmond 2014, 11).

Heywire's evolution over the years aligns with the ways ABC Radio as a whole has incorporated cross-media, increasingly participatory practices into its programming. The ABC now has numerous multi-platform Radio projects which, while different from Heywire in many ways and often more extensively cross-media, share its aim to provide space for the stories and viewpoints of members of the public. According to Edmond, first-person storytelling, anecdotes, forms of oral history and personal essays are commonplace in contemporary cross-media radio productions, and it is in part this emphasis on life storytelling and "ordinary voices" that constitutes the unique and recognisably radio-born approach to transmedia content (Edmond 2014, 6). Edmond argues:

Intimacy, liveness, personal conversation, a sense of direct, 'unmediated' and therein 'more trustworthy' and 'more authentic' communication – these have long been considered the defining aesthetic characteristics of radio and they continue to be a major force in determining the kinds of radio stories being told, and the manner in which they are told, in an era of converged, multi-platform media (ibid).

⁹ Some of the ABC's many multi-platform, participatory Radio projects include ABC Open which broadcasts content on ABC Television, Radio, and Online. *Now Hear This* is an ABC Radio National project that hosts live storytelling performances in cities around Australia that are broadcast on air twice a week. Heywire stories have featured on Television in the past, but no longer do so.

Projects such as Heywire and the newer, more extensively cross-media projects such as ABC Open and *Now Hear This* evidently adhere to the conventions and characteristics of traditional radio through their explicit focus on life narrative and first-person stories, and the intimacy, rawness and realness of everyday lives that these projects convey. However, they encourage new forms of interaction and participation, and can reach new audiences via their use of multiple platforms and online components which enable repeat listens, views, visits and sharing (Edmond 2014, 12). The contribution that life storytelling projects such as Heywire make to the contemporary media landscape can as such be seen in the way these projects continue to deliver ABC Radio audiences content that has recognisably radio-based characteristics, but that also enables forms of interaction and engagement that are well suited to people's contemporary media habits.

It is clear that Heywire's focus on personal narrative positions it in a within a spectrum of ABC initiatives. However, several of its features and objectives differentiate it and make it seem quite an awkward fit with the projects it looks to align itself with. Hirst suggests that Heywire fits alongside other ABC Radio projects such as ABC Open and has very similar objectives; however, Heywire is significantly different from the ABC's other participatory media and storytelling projects in a number of ways. ABC Open provides a particularly good point for comparison because of its collaboration with Heywire, and because of parallels between its focus on regional people and self-representation, and Heywire's aim to capture and broadcast the personal stories of rural and regional youth.

ABC Open

Digital media, participation, and the authenticity of "ordinary people's" voices and their representations of their lives and experiences appear to be the values central to ABC Open. Open aims to involve regional communities in a collaborative process of producing and publishing creative content, through which people will learn and develop digital media and storytelling skills (ABC 2012b). The ABC Open website describes its aims are "to offer lots of ways for people to get involved and over time to build up a rich picture of what life is like living in regional Australia for the rest of the country and the world – told by people who know about it best... you" (ABC 2012a).

ABC Open is more heavily staffed than Heywire, comprising "45 ABC Open producers across Australia who facilitate the creation of digital media content to be

published through ABC Open” (Dwyer 2014, 2). Where Heywire represents an almost a ‘build it and they will come’ approach, ABC Open demonstrates a close collaboration between media professionals and participants by facilitating numerous workshops where participants are guided to create and upload content. In addition to the facilitated storytelling and digital media workshops, ABC Open obtains user-created content through “spontaneous participation”, where users simply upload content of their own accord (Dwyer 2014, 12). Producers also curate content through a number of themed projects which ask participants to respond to specific questions, or contribute a specific type of content that relates to the theme. For example, as of 2015 ABC Open’s themed projects include ‘500 words: Grandparents’, which asks contributors to “[d]escribe your relationship with a grandparent using one fond memory. Draw on your senses to recall specific details and reflect on the impact he or she made on your life” (ABC 2015a). ‘Where You’ll Find Me’ is another project that asks: “How do you spend your summer days and nights? Make a 30 second video that tells us where you are” (ibid). ABC Open professes to be “a community participation project” (ABC 2015b; Dwyer 2014, 8); yet, the rather prescriptive nature of the themed projects and the webpages of “Tips & Tutorials” reveal that this initiative has fairly ridged ideas about how participation and user-created content should occur. As in Heywire, participation is on the ABC’s terms.

The processes through which ABC Open acquires content, including the close involvement of staff members who facilitate storytelling and digital media workshops and also work one-on-one with participants (Dwyer 2014, 7), mean that ABC Open achieves both quantity and quality in the content it obtains. For example, while the Heywire website states that “9,000+ stories entered” into the Heywire competition since 1998, as of April 13, 2015, ABC Open boasts that 72, 315 stories have been shared via Open since its initiation in 2010. While visitors to the Heywire website will find hundreds of highly personal text-based narratives, often with spelling and grammatical errors, the ABC Open website hosts a multitude of highly professional photographs, audio-visual narratives and text pieces. Additionally, distribution for Heywire stories is for the most part limited to ABC Local Radio in regional areas, via the social media platforms that Heywire staff use to promote winning narratives, and the Heywire website. ABC Open content, on the other hand, is distributed via television channels in addition to Radio, social media, and various ABC websites.

The similarities between ABC Open and Heywire prompt questions as to how and why these projects coexist within the ABC. Likewise, the differences between these two projects, such as the high level of quality of ABC Open content and the project’s varied

distribution model, raise questions as to why Heywire still exists alongside what could be considered a more sophisticated version of a PSM-managed life storytelling project. In many ways, ABC Open might seem to offer a more effective model of digitally-enabled audience participation than Heywire, since it demonstrates a more proficient use of new media technologies and has a greater number of participants. Heywire's producers might claim that it is the Regional Youth Summit and Heywire's aptitude for giving its participants a voice in Parliament House that differentiates it and ensures its continued relevance alongside newer initiatives like ABC Open. I would add that it is also Heywire's focus on narrative, as opposed to other forms of content, that marks it as unique. While a project such as ABC Open is clearly capturing and amplifying regional stories and voices, its reasons for existing appear to be to reflect the ABC's digital reinvention demonstrate and a new model of interacting with audiences. Like ABC Pool, ABC Open's focus is on engaging members of the public as users rather than audiences, and facilitating the production of high-quality user-created content, thus fulfilling the ABC's digital media and innovation remits. Heywire, by comparison, invites storytelling for the purposes of self-representation and voice, and new media technologies have to a large extent been a means to achieving this end, rather than a core part of the project's focus.

ABC Open certainly demonstrates a sophisticated use of new media for audience involvement and an efficient model by which the broadcaster can obtain and publish user-created content; however it could be critiqued for being more concerned with content quantity and quality than it is about enabling people to author their own identities and represent their own lives via the PSM. The close facilitation and editorial involvement of ABC Open staff and the themed projects that curate participants' contributions do not fully support the emergence of new voices, on their own terms. The emphasis is on content and sharing rather than on narrative, voice and self-representation. Heywire also shapes and constrains participation in various ways, and it is by no means an unproblematic model for amplifying unheard voices; yet its specific focus on life narrative, as opposed to any other form of content, means it is more successfully a platform that invites and recognises personal voices and stories. As a platform for narrative, Heywire's precise affordances centre on meaning-making, identity-making practices, enabling this project to have a roll outside of the highly curated space of content creation offered by ABC Pool and ABC Open. The specific appeal and value of opportunities for narrative are discussed in chapter five.

Differentiating Heywire: diverse objectives and conflicting agendas

Despite the emphasis that is placed on the idea of *self*-representation, and the idea that the stories and voices that emerge through projects like ABC Open and Heywire are those of the individuals who participated, organisational structures and agendas inevitably impact upon the way personal stories are constructed, articulated and heard. Considering the objectives that have caused the emergence of such projects in PSM institutions such as the ABC, and the various aims of those who fund, facilitate and participate can reveal the ways in which tensions arise on multiple levels as people's self-representations are required to fulfil the numerous institutional agendas.

Projects such as ABC Open, ABC Pool and Heywire can all be classified under a wide-reaching movement by public service media institutions to develop new ways of involving and interacting with their audiences. In the case of Heywire, there are additional, political agendas which govern and shape the project. Unlike ABC Open, Pool, *Now Hear This* and the plethora of other participatory media projects and opportunities that the ABC facilitates, Heywire invites story contributions for the purpose of a competition and the politically-focussed Regional Youth Summit. While the foremost aims of projects such as ABC Pool and ABC Open centre on user-created content and participatory media, Heywire was developed with a whole other set of objectives and a strong political agenda.

Engaging rural and regional youth and facilitating their self-expression and self-representation is imperative to Heywire's partnership with the Australian Federal Government departments that support the project through funding and their involvement at the annual Heywire Regional Youth Summit. For Heywire's Government partners, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Education, supporting Heywire is one way of demonstrating the department's commitment to supporting regional communities and the country's youth. While its partnership with the Government has always been key to Heywire, this relationship means there is a necessity for Heywire to fulfil specific outcomes and be beneficial to regional communities. Such expectations seem far removed from Heywire's aim to provide youth with a platform for storytelling. While the project seeks to facilitate youth voice, there are rather rigid parameters around the sort of voice that may be had.

One of the philosophical tensions within the project can be seen in the ways ideas of voice and self-representation are constructed. Two different concepts of voice can be seen in the way Hirst describes Heywire. He says:

Basically, I see it as a platform for the stories and ideas of youth of rural, remote and regional Australia. We basically aim to give a voice to young people in two ways: one is through the website and competition, where we ask them to give us a window on their lives in regional Australia, and then by choosing between 35 and 40 young people to represent their region, on the ABC but also in Canberra. So the idea is to give them a voice on the ABC and in Canberra (Hirst, interview, October 2012).

Although some of Heywire's aims and values adhere to the principles of digital storytelling and the hope to provide an underrepresented cohort with a platform from which to tell their own stories, in their own voices, the style of voice that is privileged in this project is in many ways antithetical to the notions of participation, self-expression and self-representation that are core principles of digital storytelling. While the concept of participation and digital storytelling initiatives privilege inclusivity, and are an attempt to engage and amplify a diversity of voices, Heywire's competition and political imperative work against these ideals.

It is clear in Hirst's comments, and through observing the ways the ABC promote Heywire on Local Radio and on the website that the institution's concept of Heywire's usefulness and uniqueness is firmly centred on the idea that the project provides youth with a political voice at the Summit in Canberra, with an opportunity to be heard within Parliament House, and it supports them to make a difference in their own lives in regional communities. As emerges through the youth interviews discussed in chapter four and participants' stories analysed in chapter five, these institutional expectations are sometimes complemented, if not entirely shared, by Heywire's youth participants. Jenkins and Carpentier (2013, 9) specify that "a set of shared expectations" is an important criterion for achieving full participation, and where the intentions of youth participants and the institution align, Heywire effectively fosters a meaningful degree of involvement. At other times, however, it is clear that the expectations and hopes that young people have for their narratives conflict with broader institutional objectives. In such instances, Heywire under-delivers on its potential to facilitate the emergence of a diversity of voices and viewpoints.

Due to Heywire's partnership with the Federal Government, the concept of 'voice' largely pertains to the highlighting of issues and concerns faced by non-metropolitan youth

and the project aims to develop young people's capacity to address these. 'Voice' as such means "the opportunity to not only express their views but also to get results" (Tacchi 2012, 655)¹⁰. Supporting young people to be change-makers in their own communities is in many ways a useful part of the project, and some specific ways in which Heywire and the Summit have produced positive outcomes will be outlined later in this chapter. Yet, since the focus of this thesis is on narrative and digital technologies as tools for participation within PSM and the personal outcomes of voice for Heywire's rural and regional storytellers, an in depth investigation of the broader social and political implications of the project are beyond the scope of this research. Despite the value that may be found in guiding young people to develop ideas for change, expecting the personal stories of youth to fulfil political agendas in many other ways limits Heywire's usefulness as a project and platform that endeavours to capture and acknowledge the broad variety of stories that young, rural and regional people have to share.

Funding structure

As a project of ABC Radio, Heywire is predominantly funded by the ABC, yet it is also sponsored by a number of government departments. These originally included the Department of Transport and Regional Services, the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), the Australian Sports Commission, and Outward Bound Australia (McKenzie and James 2003, 9). The ABC resecures financial support on an annual basis, and the following Government departments sponsor Heywire now:

- RIRDC
- the Department of Agriculture
- the Department of Health

¹⁰ While Tacchi is referring to the social and political potential of the digital storytelling project Finding a Voice, this thesis is more interested in the personal outcomes of Heywire for its participants, rather than this project's broader social and political implications. Since Tacchi's work provides numerous helpful insights about the usefulness of narrative and digital technologies for achieving personal voice and for fostering participation, I draw on it consistently throughout this thesis, though not for the purpose of closely investigating political voice in Heywire or the project's capacity for social change.

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- the Department of Education and Training
 - the Department of Social Services
 - the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

This is a rather disparate group of departments for Heywire to receive funding from, and some questions can be asked about how effectively these Federal bodies can come together to support a youth storytelling project. The linking factor between these Departments and the reason they support a project such as this is their shared interest in creating and sustaining strong rural and regional communities. Appendix 1 describes these Departments and discusses their interest in and understanding of Heywire in more depth.

RIRDC and the Department of Agriculture appear to be the two main Government sponsors for Heywire. RIRDC is a Government corporation closely connected with the Department of Agriculture which leads research in areas such as ‘Animal Industries’, ‘Plant Industries’, and ‘Rural People and Issues’ (RIRDC 2015). RIRDC has been a long-term support of the Heywire project; it provides funding and many people from the corporation attend the Summit and participate in the focus groups with rural and regional youth. In their 2011-2012 Annual Report, RIRDC listed Heywire under the ‘Awards and Scholarships’ section (RIRDC 2012, 41) and acknowledged their Corporation’s continuing support of the project. Sponsorship of “ABC Heywire” was also listed as an ‘Expected key output for 2011-2012’ (ibid, 138). According to this report, Heywire is one of a number of projects that RIRDC invests in and that are “building leadership capacity and skills in young people and women to ensure they have opportunities to contribute to positive change in rural communities” (RIRDC 2012, 137).

RIRDC’s emphasis on leadership and positive change reflects values articulated in a 2003 report *Evaluating Heywire: Reviewing the Program – the ABC Gives Rural Youth a Voice* (McKenzie and James 2003). This report is an interesting contrast to this thesis since it was the first major evaluation of Heywire and it looked at the project as a “youth leadership scheme”, rather than as a platform for storytelling. The *Evaluating Heywire* report was funded by RIRDC and analysed the effectiveness of Heywire by focusing on the Regional Youth Summit and the experiences of its attendees, conjecturing that Heywire has succeeded in fulfilling a gap in leadership programs for rural youth (McKenzie and James 2003, 25), and that it contributed to young people’s development of self-confidence and maturity (ibid, 52). This report was produced before the creation of the Heywire Blog, and it

does not consider the uniqueness or usefulness of Heywire as an opportunity and platform for narrative self-representation. Despite the obvious differences in angle, McKenzie and James's research is useful to consider alongside this thesis since it provides background information about the ABC's initial aims for Heywire, as well as RIRDC's motivations and expectations.

Evidently, RIRDC's expectations of Heywire centre on what may be achieved at the Summit, and mark a significant shift away from understanding the project as a storytelling platform. This is problematic because it overlooks the value, or potential value, that Heywire may have for the vast majority of young people who share stories through Heywire but who are not invited to attend the Summit. There is conflict between the hope that Heywire will provide a space for the seldom heard stories of youth, and the expectation for these stories to fulfil Government agendas, such as the objective to develop young community leaders.

According to Hirst, the Government departments that provide funding are "not just sponsors"; rather, he explains their involvement in Heywire as a partnership. In our interview Hirst described the Summit to me and emphasised the importance of the Government's involvement: "without the Government's engagement, without the ministers turning up the winners' impact in Canberra would be *so much less*" (interview, October 2012). From Hirst's description, it is evident that his vision for Heywire is that the project will support young, rural and regional people to have their ideas and opinions heard by the country's decision makers, and that the project will provide them with a space and the tools to lead positive change in their communities.

The people in the Federal departments listed above show an active interest in Heywire, visiting the website, following @Heywire on Twitter, and the stories from rural and regional youth are often referred to in parliamentary meetings. Engaging with Heywire in order to learn which issues, concerns and experiences are of current relevance to rural people, and young people, is common across all the departments that provide funding. Hirst comments that a significant part of his job centres on organising funding and ensuring the Government reaches Heywire on all its different platforms (interview, October 2012). Describing the ministers and politicians' participation at the winners' Summit in Canberra, Hirst states that they engage with Heywire winners as a "focus group for their campaigns" and that Heywire winners are a group with which they can 'test' their ideas for new initiatives and potential changes in policies (ibid). I will give some examples of the focus

group sessions that youth and Federal politicians participate in later in this chapter, in the section in which I describe the Summit.

Heywire producers appear to hope that young people's personal narratives will naturally fulfil their particular objectives for the project, and their vision for how storytelling and self-expression might be helpful for rural and regional youth. The Government departments listed above also have a specific agenda for what Heywire will deliver; however, by analysing the Heywire website and looking at the types of narratives young people share, it is evident that rural and regional youth often tell stories to fulfil their own objectives, and these do not always align with the broader aims and visions of the project, nor those of its Government partners. As chapter five demonstrates, the storytellers on the Heywire website often repurpose the affordances of the platform to fulfil their own intentions for telling stories.

The ABC's aims

The ABC has numerous objectives for Heywire, the diversity of which produces some conflict in the project. In aiming for Heywire to fulfil several functions simultaneously, the project tends to overlook and undermine the value that young people may find in simply having a platform from which to share life narratives. Examining Heywire as comprising the three distinct levels described in the Introduction (see figure 2) helps illuminate some of the contradictions in the ABC's hopes and intentions for the project and the tensions produced on a structural level. On its first level, as a storytelling platform, Heywire appears inclusive and to be genuinely striving to provide a space for regional young people to share self-representational stories and participate in the creation of their own identities. Yet, the competition and second level imposes certain criteria on these life narratives and upholds some as 'better' or somehow more worthy than others. Furthermore, the third level – the Summit in Canberra – has a strong political focus and additional agendas which seem ill-fitting with the aims to facilitate voice and self-representation.

Providing youth with an opportunity to "communicate to a large audience the challenges, concerns, ideas and what it is like to be a young person in rural, regional and remote Australia" is Heywire's foremost objective (McKenzie and James 2003, vii), and, through inviting them to share personal narratives, ABC Rural aimed for Heywire to "capture and promote" their opinions, ideas and concerns (ibid, 9). Furthermore, as has been described on the Heywire website, the project provides an important "vehicle" for

young people to represent their own lives and opinions, rather than have representations constructed for them by others (Heywire 2011). In addition to these objectives, Heywire aims to support young people to “make a difference” and “[d]evelop ideas to improve life for young people in regional Australia” at the Summit and through the new Grants program (Heywire 2014c).

The people who have worked for Heywire value the life narratives that young people share, and see storytelling as a fundamental tool through which they can represent their lives to others. As I wrote earlier, Justine McSweeney has been involved in the project since its inception. She has attended every Summit, and describes herself as an advisor or “sounding board” for Hirst and Atkins who manage the project now (interview, October 2012). McSweeney comments that while she has seen Heywire develop and change over the years as different producers bring new styles of management to the project, the central goals and values of the project have remained the same: “Heywire has always been about young people sharing stories”, she says (ibid). From this perspective, the project can be understood as inclusive and the individuality and specificity of young people’s personal stories is central and celebrated.

Much research has investigated personal narrative and life storytelling in a variety of fields, including cultural studies and health studies. This work, examined in more depth in chapter five, demonstrates that there are many personal benefits individuals may experience from the process of constructing and sharing stories about themselves and their lives. Narrating – understood as the twofold process of creating and communicating personal stories – is essentially a means through which beings organise and make sense of their experiences and articulate them to others. As Garro and Mattingly state “[n]arrative is a fundamental human way of giving meaning to experience” (in Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 9). It is explicitly a sense-making ‘tool’ (ibid, 10) through which we make meaning of and symbolise our experiences to ourselves and to others (Concalves et al. in Angus and McLeod 2004, 103). The ABC’s approach to using narrative as a mode of ‘capturing’ young people’s voices reflects these values and ideas. According to McSweeney, Heywire asks young people to “tell their live experiences in order to give others an understanding of what their lives are like in rural and regional areas. It [Heywire] has always been about increasing understanding” (interview, October 2012).

The narrative focus, and the value placed on storytelling positions Heywire within the digital storytelling ‘movement’ described in chapter two. The ABC’s aspirations for

Heywire reflect some overarching trends and patterns in institutional applications of digital storytelling. Kelly McWilliam identifies three major themes for framing community-based digital storytelling practice: historical (collecting public histories); aspirational (empowering people, especially those who are marginalised); and recuperative (helping storytellers overcome adversity) (in Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 53). McWilliam's themes draw attention to the fact that there are some differences between the ABC's aims for the Heywire website and the way it is actually being used by rural and regional youth. These themes, rather than accurately representing the variety of stories that youth share via Heywire, more closely reflect the ABC's visions for the project. The aspirational and recuperative themes in particular closely represent the ABC's aims that the Heywire initiative will empower rural and regional youth by providing them with an opportunity to express their views and have them recognised (McKenzie and James 2003, 9, 50).

A significant number of stories on the Heywire website fulfil these broad intentions by describing rural and regional or youth issues, and suggesting ways for improving life for young people in non-metropolitan Australia. Furthermore, storytellers who describe difficult experiences and what they learned from these also fit Heywire's rationale. However, there are a number of stories that do not suggest, in any way, that the storyteller was empowered or healed through sharing a narrative. Stories that convey negative thoughts, feelings or experiences without drawing a moral or conclusion from it – such as a suggestion for change – or do not make some sort of constructive *point* about rural or regional life do not fulfil the ABC's intentions. As a result, they will not win the Heywire competition and they sit awkwardly in the Heywire space. The diversity of stories that youth share via Heywire will be discussed in depth in chapter five.

Despite the centrality of narrative, voice, and the value placed on the uniqueness of life stories, the annual Heywire competition and the objective to bring the 35-40 winning storytellers together for the Regional Youth Summit has always been the most privileged part of Heywire. The "all-expenses-paid trip to the Heywire Summit" (Heywire 2014c) is pitched as the incentive to contribute narratives to the Heywire website. The competition and the Summit are heavily advertised on ABC Local Radio in regional areas, on triple j, and on the Heywire website, where there are numerous links to webpages that invite young people to "check out some of our successful stories" from previous years. McSweeney states that although Heywire has evolved since 1998, the Summit in Canberra has always been a part of the project (interview, October 2012). For Hirst, the Summit and the "on the ground" interactions with the 40 or so rural and regional competition winners is the most

essential and interesting part of the whole project, and the component that renders it particularly unique in terms of youth-engagement initiatives¹¹.

Hirst compares Heywire to other storytelling projects and political engagement initiatives simultaneously, finding it exists somewhere in between. For instance, the ABC has a number of projects, such as ABC Open, which ask people to share personal narratives. Government organisations such as YouthCARE and Landcare also ask individuals to tell stories about their lives. According to Hirst, many other projects that make use of personal narrative often ask people to share stories about a specific topic. Landcare, for example, asks for stories about the environment, or environmental issues. Political programs like Youth Parliament commonly engage young people through asking them to fill in a form, or expression of interest. However, Hirst finds that “[t]here aren’t any programs that I know of that use storytelling as a vehicle for getting your voice heard in the corridors of power” (Hirst, interview, October 2012). For Hirst, Heywire’s focus on narrative is the key feature that differentiates it from programs designed to provide youth with an opportunity to learn about Australia’s political system and express their views in Government. Likewise, he suggests that Heywire is different from other storytelling projects because of its political focus.

¹¹ This information was drawn from a background conversation held with Dan Hirst on July 25, 2012.

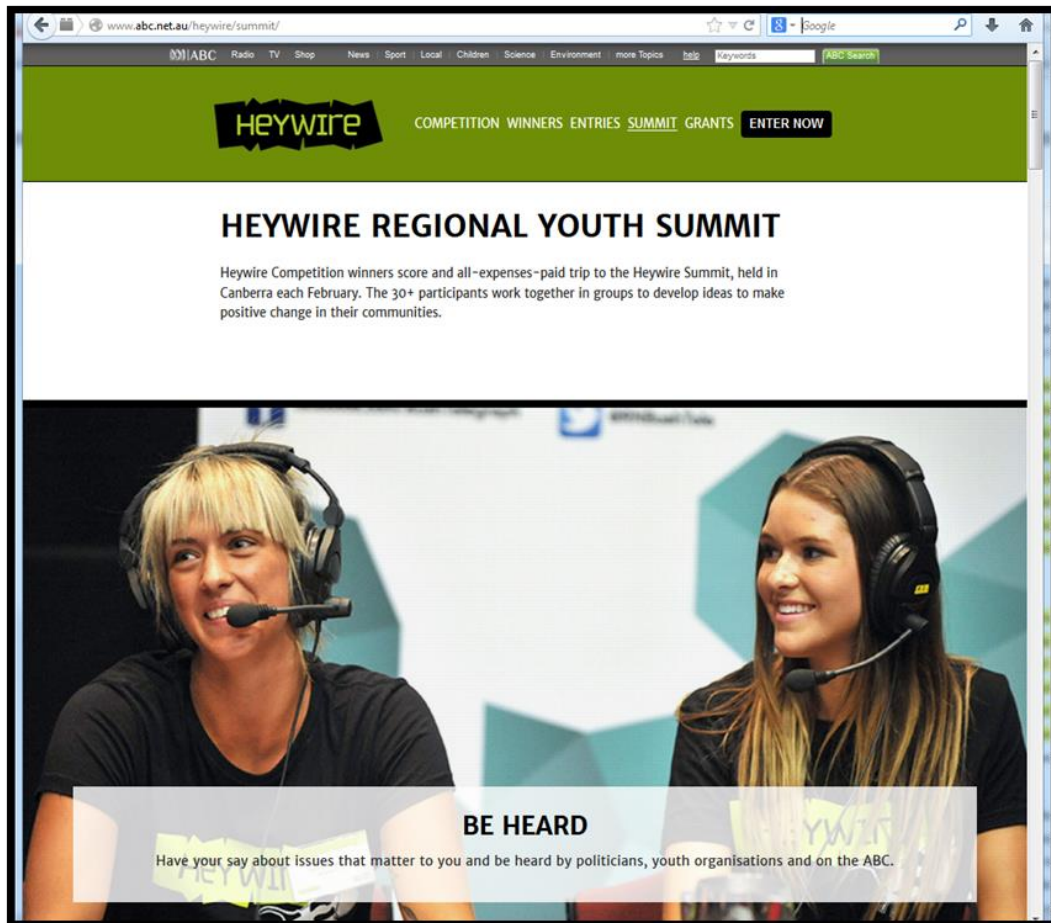


Figure 4: Heywire webpage describing the Summit.

The Regional Youth Summit reveals the complexity of ways in which Government agendas are integrated into the Heywire project. The objectives of the Summit centre on youth leadership and community development. As described on the Heywire website:

Over the week participants undertake leadership workshops and meet with members of parliament, government departments and community leaders. The 'Heywirers' work together in teams to develop ideas aimed at improving the lives of young people in regional Australia. The ideas are presented at Parliament House in front of an esteemed panel (Heywire 2014d).

Here, Heywire seems to have more in common with the civic engagement programs mentioned above than with digital storytelling projects, or ABC initiatives such as ABC Open. Supporting "the positive and personal development of young community leaders" (Sadov 2009, 3) and providing youth with an opportunity to learn problem solving and communication skills ("What exactly is the Heywire Regional Youth Summit?" 2012) are objectives which have been central to the Summit since the first of these events took place in 1998.

The effectiveness of Heywire in terms of youth leadership and community development, while not the concern of this thesis, was analysed in McKenzie and James's 2003 report which evaluated the project by focusing on the Summit and the experiences of the 1998-2000 cohorts of competition winners (McKenzie and James 2003, vii). McKenzie and James aligned "the Heywire Program" with other leadership and regional development initiatives that target young people and described the Summit as a program "designed to give the participants leadership insights, knowledge and skills through varied experiences, presentations and activities" (McKenzie and James 2003, 9). They concluded that Heywire provides rural and regional youth with valuable opportunities for personal development and for appreciating self-worth (McKenzie and James 2003, viii). Further, the Summit effectively supported participants' development of problem solving and leadership skills (ibid). From McKenzie and James's (2003) perspective, young people's constructing and sharing of personal narratives appears mostly important insofar as it is a 'tool' the ABC uses for identifying young, rural and regional people who can potentially lead positive change in their communities.

Through each of my levels of involvement with the project I have come to understand that this attitude is still central now. In Heywire, Hirst describes storytelling "as a vehicle for getting your voice heard in the corridors of power" (interview, October 2012). From this perspective, storytelling as a tool for self-expression and self-representation seems to be a secondary part of the Heywire project, or an incidental outcome that comes from inviting young people to share stories about their lives and experiences. Yet, this is contradictory to the way the ABC also emphasises that Heywire is about the value that may be found in telling stories and listening to those of others (Sadov 2009, 3; McSweeney, Interview, October 2012). Furthermore, it largely contradicts the ABC's aims for Heywire that portray the project as an inclusive 'space' and platform in which the voices of a minority group can be heard.

While Heywire's intentions and claims about the project's value broadly reflect the aims of digital storytelling, the organisational and political agendas embedded in the project's structure mean that young people's own intentions for their stories and the personal benefits they may experience from the process of narrating are often overlooked or lost. The competition and Summit for winners are a clear contradiction to the principles of digital storytelling. They reveal Heywire as exclusive and elitist, rather than a project that offers youth an opportunity and space in which to share personal stories and represent and express themselves, their ideas and experiences. These two levels of Heywire enforce a

standard on young people's narratives which risks undermining the personal value that they may derive from simply authoring and sharing stories.

The website

The Heywire website is a significant feature of the project, not least because it is now the main avenue through which youth enter the competition and share their opinions, ideas, describe their lives and represent their identities; the website has enabled new styles of storytelling to emerge, and it increases the visibility of Heywire narratives. Prior to the creation of the Heywire website, young people submitted their stories to the competition via post, either in the form of a short written piece or as an audio story recorded on a cassette tape. Only stories which were selected as winning entries and broadcast by the ABC were publicly available. However, via the website, a much broader collection of life narratives can be seen and widely shared by others.



Figure 5: Heywire website homepage, July 14th 2014.

The website has undergone a number of changes over the years. Between its creation in 2008 and July 2014, this platform functioned similarly to a blog that was managed by the ABC and invited contributions from 16-22 young people who became 'Heywire members'. The ABC's Heywire producers contributed feature articles and provided links to ABC news articles that might be of interest to rural and regional youth – such as education or agricultural topics – and monitored memberships and usage of the site. While Heywire competition entries were formerly written pieces that could be produced and performed on-air, via the website, Heywire encourages young people to make use of a variety of media and create and share their personal stories using text, photographs, video, audio and any combination of these.

Heywire facilitators initially envisioned that, via the website, the Heywire project could enable young, rural and regional people from all across the country to communicate with each other and establish feelings of being a legitimate and valuable part of a group in spite of the thousands of kilometres that separate them. These aims reflect celebratory discourses that new media technologies overcome distance and create new possibilities for being together. For people who are geographically dispersed "media forms encompass the possibility of joining and belonging in the present" (Couldry and McCarthy 2004, 3). Based on aspects of shared identity and common cares and concerns, the ABC conceptualised Heywire as a community. As stated in the *Heywire Resource Guide*:

Belonging to Heywire gives the member access to like-minded peers who share common aspirations and are confronted with similar problems. Heywire's overall aim is to create a shared conversation amongst young people in rural and regional Australia (Sadov 2009, 3).

It appears that because the website's users were people who shared the identity category 'rural and regional youth', and shared common hopes, aims and problems (Sadov 2009, 3), the space could be imagined as a community. However, the functionality of the Heywire website has never enabled the degree of interaction or communication, or fostered the sorts of relationships or "meaningful bonds" (Chandler and Munday 2011) necessary for it to be regarded as a community, and young people's participation in this space has never resembled the sorts of interactions that define community.

The Heywire website is largely ineffective as a community for both structural and organisational reasons. For example, the Heywire website does not provide the

communicative functions such as chat or messenger that social networks do, and it is a platform managed and moderated by a large organisation. It is in principle different from the spaces where young people choose to conduct their day to day interactions. The nature of young, rural and regional people's use of the Heywire website over the past seven years indicates that Heywire is not useful to young people for networking or communicating with each other.

Ito et al.'s discussion of 'genres of participation' helps extend ideas of connection and community by identifying "different modes or conventions for engaging with new media" (Ito et al. 2010, 15). In particular, these authors make a distinction between friendship-driven and interest-driven genres of participation (ibid). Friendship-driven genres of participation are the mediated spaces and practices that people engage with to interact with their already-established community. Ito et al. describe social networks such as Facebook and MySpace as emblematic of 'friendship-driven genres of participation' (2010, 16); these sites can be understood as mediated versions of one's offline, or unmediated social worlds since the network comprises the peers and friends who youth are closely affiliated with. Conversely, in interest-driven genres, "specialized activities, interests, or niche and marginalized identities come first" (Ito et al. 2010, 16). Online gaming and creative production – such as video-sharing on YouTube – are interest-driven genres of participation (Horst, Stephenson and Robinson in Ito et al. 2010, 75). As Ito et al. describe, "[t]hese are the contexts where kids find relationships that centre on their interests, hobbies and career aspirations" (Ito et al. 2010, 16). Interest-driven genres are therefore those where young people may establish new connections and communities of people with similar ideas and concerns.

Of these two genres, Heywire is clearly an interest-driven site. Ito et al. find that interest-driven practices such as digital photography and making and sharing videos online can overlap with friendship-driven genres of participation (2010, 16), however, this is not the case with Heywire. While a number of young people from the same class, siblings, or friends may contribute to Heywire, the website's users do not solely comprise one's existing friends and associates. Moreover, unlike general patterns of young people's new media use, youth do not transition fluidly between Heywire and other online environments. As such, the boundaries between friendship-driven practices such as interacting with friends on Facebook and participation on a site such as Heywire remain very clear. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, unlike the activities identified as interest-driven, including electronic gaming, fandom (Horst, Stephenson and Robinson in Ito et al. 2010,

75), and creative production (Lange and Ito in Ito et al. 2010, 243-246, 290), the Heywire website has no obvious connection to one's peer or friendship group. In addition, and contrary to the earlier claims, young people do not tend to develop new friendships on the Heywire website. Secondly, according to analyses of narratives shared on the Heywire website and interviews with the site's users, the content youth create for Heywire is unsuitable for their social network sites, simply because they are stories.

While membership, profile pages, the creation and sharing of various sorts of media content, and the comment function were arguably the features that led the ABC to draw comparisons between the Heywire website, YouTube and Facebook, and envisage this platform as a community, the Heywire website was, and still is, generically different from these other media. Few youth chose to personalise their profile pages on the Heywire website, and the 'About me' section was usually left blank. Additionally, the exclamation 'No comments yet!' could be seen at the bottom of the vast majority of Heywire stories, indicating that this function was rarely used. ABC staff who have had long-term involvement with the project now note that the website's most useful, most effective function is as an avenue for young people to enter the Heywire competition (Hirst, interview, 2012), and as a repository for their stories (McSweeney, interview, 2012).

For Heywire's facilitators and producers, the fact the website has not been able to live up to their initial hopes for it might be regarded as a major failing. However, viewing the Heywire website in terms of its similarities to YouTube and social media is futile for two reasons. Firstly, the comparison only highlights the website's shortcomings by revealing it is not interactive, and secondly, it completely ignores the affordances of Heywire that are very unique from social networks, blogs and a video-sharing site. The Heywire website is unique in the way it provides a platform for rural and regional young people to create and express identities through sharing stories about their lives, a feature that will be discussed at length in chapter five.

The Heywire website changed significantly in mid-July 2014 and the ABC now represents and seems to value this space in ways vastly different from before. The nature of these changes mean a number of things: that the ABC acknowledges and has responded to the fact Heywire never effectively fostered interaction or communication between young people; they reflect the ABC's sense that the most useful function of the website – both for participants and for facilitators – is that it is a quick and efficient avenue for youth to submit stories to the competition; further, they are broadly representative of shifts in the

ABC's visions for the project and website, and evidence that they are still striving to define Heywire's place and relevance in a media environment that is radically different from the one in which it was initiated.

In some ways, the ABC appears to have simplified the Heywire website and narrowed their scope for it. Young people are no longer required to become an ABC Communities member in order to submit stories to the competition; the website does not enable them to create a personal profile page; and there is no longer the comment function that enables them to post comments on other people's stories. The ABC no longer emphasises the idea that the Heywire website is the main platform which provides youth with an opportunity for voice, and they no longer claim it is an interactive, discursive space, or a "safe online community" (Heywire 2011). Rather, it is a website that provides information about the Heywire project and competition and a step by step guide designed to assist young people to upload multimedia stories.

The screenshot shows the ABC website's Heywire competition entry page. The URL is www.abc.net.au/heywire/enter_now/. The page has a green header with the Heywire logo and navigation links: COMPETITION, WINNERS, ENTRIES, SUMMIT, GRANTS, and an ENTER NOW button. Below the header, the main heading is 'ENTER YOUR STORY'. A progress bar shows four steps: Step 1 Eligibility (highlighted in green), Step 2 Your story, Step 3 Topics, and Step 4 Your details. Under 'Are you eligible?', there are input fields for 'Date of Birth (dd-mm-yyyy)' and 'Postcode', followed by a green 'Calculate' button. At the bottom, a section titled 'TIPS FOR CREATING A WINNING STORY' lists 'Text Stories', 'Audio Stories', 'Video Stories', and 'Photo Stories'.

Figure 6: Steps for entering a Heywire story.

The design of the new Heywire website, the nature of the information presented and the ways in which this information is organised reveals that the website is far from being a youth-oriented space. Evidently, as an ABC project, the website has always been closely managed and moderated by the ABC. However, in the past there seemed the possibility that the website could be a space that was primarily for the stories of youth. Through profile pages and the blog-like functionality of the old website, young people could to some degree personalise the space, and build an identity through contributing content that would be listed on their own profile pages. In replacing these functions and restructuring the website to emphasise the primacy of the competition and provide more information about the Summit, the website has become much less a space for youth voices and much more an ABC website where most pages are dedicated to providing information about the competition, the annual Heywire Summit that competition winners attend, and the project ideas that youth develop at this event.


Criteria and judging

Heywire shapes participation implicitly rather than through overt guidelines about what young people can and cannot contribute to the website. In some ways, and in spite of Heywire's Government partnership and the centrality of the Summit, the project appears to invite young people to share any kind of story they wish to. Youth participants are not provided with strict criteria or instructions for the type of content that they can contribute. The ABC specifies that Heywire stories must be true, but according to Executive Producer Dan Hirst, the criteria for Heywire competition entries are otherwise non-specific (interview, October 2012). For example, the website states that "[t]he Heywire competition calls for stories about you and the community where you live" (Heywire 2013a). In other ways, however, Heywire can be seen to distinctly encourage stories that identify issues that pertain to life in regional communities, and the project evidently privileges stories that have a clear purpose and reveal turning points.

The webpage *Tips for a great entry* (see figure 6) provides suggestions such as "It's about you"; "Look for moments rather than generalities"; "Look for turning points" and it asks youth to consider a number of questions including "What's a challenge you've overcome?" and "Why do you like living where you do?" (Heywire 2013b). Further, the heavy emphasis on the Summit, 'making a difference', and 'being heard' by politicians and Government departments must inevitably encourage youth to share stories that

acknowledge and address concerns and problems that young people face due to their living rurally or regionally, or – conversely – that depict the unique and positive features of life outside of Australia’s big cities.

These suggestions indicate that Heywire encourages and favours stories that have a clear aim or purpose, that follow a narrative arc, and that demonstrate what the storyteller has learned from his or her experiences. The preference for stories with positive content or an uplifting tone also emerged in an interview with online producer Jonathan Atkins. Discussing the Heywire storytelling workshops, Atkins says that he encourages young people to think beyond negative attitudes and perceptions of life in rural and regional Australia and to “move towards what they’re interested in and what they’re passionate about” (interview, November 2012). For Atkins, bravery, honesty, passion and “a pride in what you’re writing about” are features that make a good story. He states: “I always tell the students to be yourself, be brave, be honest. I tell them this is your chance to tell the stories and talk about the things *you* want to and explore the ideas and themes that matter to *you*” (interview, November 2012). Furthermore, “if it’s a tough story about mental health, it’s nice to have a little bit of hope at the end, or a message, or to talk about something you learned. That’s what I think makes a good story, anyway” (interview, November 2012). As in digital storytelling, resolve and closure are amongst the expectations that define a ‘good story’ (Poletti 2011, 78).



COMPETITION WINNERS ENTRIES SUMMIT GRANTS [ENTER NOW](#)

TIPS FOR A GREAT ENTRY

- ### 1) It's about you

Submit a true story about an aspect of your life. You are unique and the place where you live is unique, and that makes your story fascinating.
- ### 2) But not everything about you

We're not asking you to tell your whole life story. Focus on one important event or aspect of your life. Remember we recommend 400 words, 2-4 minutes of video or a series of photos.
- ### 3) Check out our past winning stories

If you are not sure what to write about, check out the **past winning stories** for inspiration or browse the popular Heywire story topics in the footer of this page.
- ### 4) Still not sure what to make your story about?

Ask yourself these questions and come up with as many answers as you can. One of them is bound to make an excellent yarn.

 - What's a challenge you've overcome?
 - What recent event has had a big event on your life?
 - What are you passionate about?
 - What makes you or your town unique?
 - Why do you like living where you do?
- ### 5) Look for specific moments rather than generalities

Instead of saying "I love my town because of the community spirit" try describing a moment from your life that illustrates that community spirit.

Figure 7: Heywire webpage *Tips for a great entry*.
<http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/competition>

Expectations around 'good storytelling' become especially explicit during the process in which Heywire producers and other ABC staff review Heywire stories, select the 35 or so "best stories" (Heywire 2011) for the purpose of the competition, and then edit and professionally produce these for broadcast. The process of co-creating and editing winning stories is described in chapter five. While the webpages of 'Tips' and the suggestions and hopes of Heywire producers offer guidelines rather than precise or

mandatory criteria for storytelling, the judging criteria for the Heywire competition is highly specific and demonstrates that the ABC are looking for winning entries to be of a certain standard and convey particular messages and meanings. While the same can be said of many competitions and initiatives that look to produce a specific outcome, this is potentially problematic for the Heywire project because of its other key aims, which are to be a platform for young people to amplify their voices and share their stories.

Judging takes place in the ABC's regional stations throughout September and October every year. Heywire's Executive Producer supplies each station with a *Heywire Winner Selection Criteria and Judging Checklist* (Hirst 2011) which guides their choice of a winner. Hirst says stories are usually judged by a panel of three people, led by the area's Rural Reporter (interview, October 2012). According to the *Checklist*, the only compulsory criterion for judging is that the story is an individual's depiction of a real event. Group entries and fictitious stories are ineligible for the competition, and judges are asked to check with the storyteller if they are unsure the narrative is non-fiction. One winner and two runner-ups are selected from each region's entrants "in case the winner proves to be ineligible" (Hirst 2011). The *Checklist* also includes a longer list of 'Desirable Criteria' which asks for stories to fulfil the following:

- work across a variety of broadcasting platforms, such as online, television and radio;
- 'represent your patch' by giving "a sense of what life is like in your region for the entrant or young people in general";
- be passionate, engaging, emotionally evocative stories that "make you sit up and pay attention";
- raise awareness over an important issue;
- and have the potential to inspire positive change in the community (Hirst 2011).

The webpages of 'Tips' and the specificity of the *Judging Checklist* reveal contradictions within Heywire's aims and its practices. Heywire professes to be a platform from which *all* rural and regional young people can share stories, articulate their thoughts and feelings, and reveal something of themselves and their personal lives through words, photographs and music. Yet there are significant, limiting boundaries that define the expressions and representations of self that may occur within this project, and thus the degree or 'intensity' of participation. According to Hirst, the 'Tips' provided participants are

purposefully non-specific (interview, October 2012) and all stories are welcome on the Heywire website¹²; however, the Heywire competition and specificity of the *Judging Checklist* sit uneasily with these aims. The *Judging Checklist* assesses Heywire narratives based on precise criteria that are hidden from the storytellers, and it makes explicit that there is a preferred type of Heywire narrative. Although Heywire producers suggest that youth can use Heywire to share any stories they wish to, the criteria for the competition reveals that the ways these stories are received and the extent to which they are promoted vary drastically. Only those which fit within the ABC's parameters are effectively amplified via ABC distribution platforms and at the Summit within Parliament House.

The Summit

The Summit is the part of Heywire in which the complexity of aims and agendas that underpin the project are most clearly revealed. I have attended this event twice: in 2009 as a Heywire participant and competition winner, and again in February 2013 as a researcher. The Summit is six days long and always held in Canberra in early February. The 35-40 competition winners and a number of ABC Radio Reporters and Producers from around Australia are flown to Canberra, where they stay at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS). The event is a combination of fun activities and sight-seeing; interviews with ABC radio reporters who broadcast features on the event; as well as 'work' which is facilitated by ABC staff and youth organisations such as the Foundation for Young Australians (fya). Facilitators guide young people to brainstorm ideas for how life in rural and regional areas can be improved for young people, and the youth participants work in groups to develop project proposals and presentations for Members of Parliament and various Government representatives. The aims for the Summit are to give Heywire winners an opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills; learn how to effectively pitch ideas; network with each other and with Federal MPs; and work with others to identify and address issues that are important to them.

¹² This information is drawn from a background conversation with Dan Hirst on July 25, 2012.

Hirst invited me to attend the last few days of the 2013 Summit – the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday which he described as “the most important days”: “Wednesday is the morning tea at Parliament House, and Thursday is the presentation and ideas pitch. I thought it might be valuable for your research,” he said. His words confirmed other research findings that indicate Heywire producers value the Summit and the project’s capacity to affect change and develop leadership skills in young, rural and regional people as the most unique, valuable aspects of Heywire. By the time I arrived on Wednesday the 6th of February, the “Heywilers” had formed groups around various topics, some of which included marriage equality, mental health and agriculture, and they were busily finalising their presentations for the “ideas pitch” they would present in Parliament House the following day.

The Heywilers did their work in a conference room at the AIS called the Gold Room. Former Heywire producer Bryce Ives continues to be involved in the Summit, and he takes the lead in facilitating the brainstorming activities that form the basis of the ideas pitches and presentations that young people give at Parliament House at the end of the week. Heywire winner Evie described one of the first brainstorming activities as the “circle activity”. The Heywilers were each given a circle of coloured paper and asked to write down an issue, an idea or vision, a concern, or something they were passionate about. According to Evie,

Everyone was just writing on pieces of paper what they want to change about their community, basically? And so yeah, lots of things were written down and tossed in the middle of the room in a big giant circle. Yeah. It was all read out in the end and sorted into groups (interview, December 2013).

ABC staff grouped the circles together into a number of common themes. At the 2013 Summit these included body image; drink driving; agriculture; homophobia, and mental health, to name a few. The participants were then asked to choose which theme or topic they cared about most, and in this way, they formed the groups they would work in for the week, and determined the topics that would be the focus of their presentations at Parliament House. By the end of the week, the Gold Room was wallpapered with pieces of butchers paper, sticky notes and the coloured circles. Each stage of the ideas and presentation development processes was depicted there.



Figure 8: Circles activity.

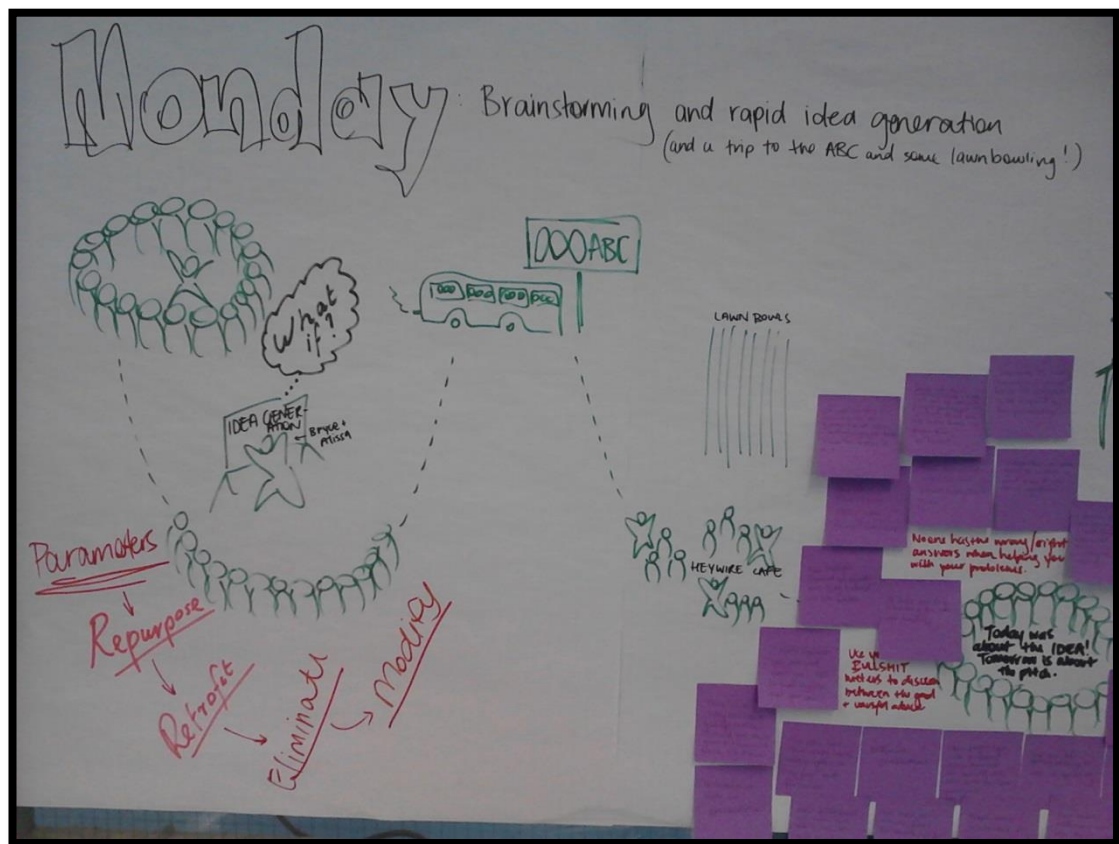


Figure 9: Brainstorming in the Gold Room.

The Summit provides a number of occasions for young people to meet with Ministers, Federal MPs and personnel from the Government departments that sponsor Heywire. One such occasion is morning tea at Parliament House during which the Heywirers meet their local MPs and representatives from various Government departments, and over cups of coffee and chocolate brownies, share their ideas, opinions, and ask questions. ABC staff encourage youth to make the most of this opportunity. They emphasise that the politicians are taking time out of their busy schedules to come and meet the Heywire

winners, that they genuinely want to hear what young people have to say, and that this is a chance for the Heywirers to walk and talk in the corridors of power and influence the decisions that affect them. Hirst, Atkins and other ABC staff involved at the Summit spend the morning tea session ensuring each Heywire winner is put in touch with their local MP and any other representative they wish to speak with.

Another occasion for youth to network and pitch ideas is the ‘speed dating’ activity which involves Heywire winners and Government representatives from a number of different departments. The Heywirers spend 5 minutes talking to one representative about their regional community, their goals or concerns, and then rotate around the room to repeat the process with someone else. During the speed dating activity and at the morning tea at Parliament House, youth are asked for their opinions on a range of youth and rural issues. For example, did young people consider binge drinking a problem in regional communities? What do they think of Australia’s ‘regional youth exodus’ – is it a case of ‘bright lights, big cities’, or is it because regional towns lack certain services that are available in the cities? How might youth be encouraged to either remain in or return to rural communities?

Through personal experience, participant observation and interviews with winners, it is clear that all attendees value the Summit as a wholesome event and that many young people feel empowered by the experience. These findings echo those described in the *Evaluating Heywire* report, which claims that the vast majority of young people who attend the Summit described it as a “once in a lifetime” and “life-changing experience” (McKenzie and James 2003, 31). These sentiments also emerged in my interviews with Heywire winners. The Summit enables young people to feel their views are sought after and valued by the country’s decision-makers – an aspect that many Heywire winners articulate as a highlight of the week and the ‘life-changing’ experience that so many of them have referred to.

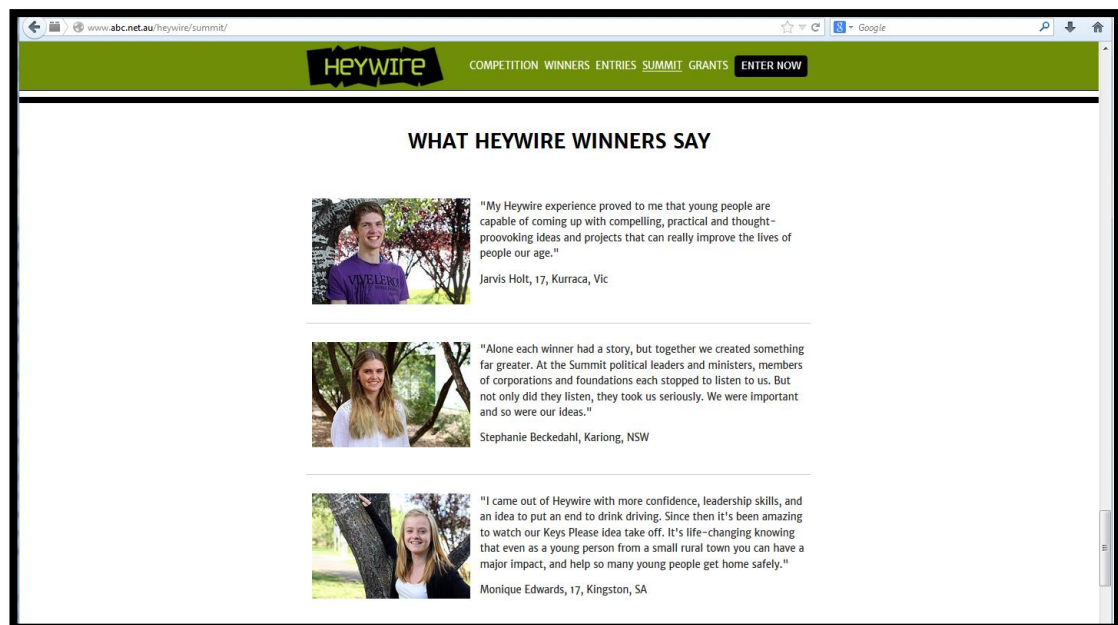


Figure 10: Testimonials from Heywire winners shown on the website.

The Regional Youth Summit is in many ways a very unusual event. Most strikingly, it represents an enormous shift of values within the Heywire project. The Summit is an exclusive event attended by young people who told the 'best' stories and as such it contrasts dramatically with notions of participation and with the principles of digital storytelling that are inherent to Heywire, as well as important to the ABC more broadly. It is clear at the Summit that Heywire's objectives no longer centre on providing a platform for the stories and myriad voices of young, rural and regional Australians. Instead, the aim of the Summit is to develop leadership skills in competition winners and facilitate their articulation and addressing of community issues so they can make their voices heard at Parliament House.

Despite the ways in which the Summit may be an empowering experience for young people, the outcomes of this event for the long term have always been questionable. This was the main critique offered in the *Evaluating Heywire* report (2003). McKenzie and James stated that the "Heywire program" evidently provided young people with important opportunities to develop personal skills, and these "were recognised and appreciated by both the participants, often their families too, and to a lesser extent their communities" (2003, 52); however, the authors also pointed out that young, regional people's need to leave their home communities in order to seek work and education opportunities meant that "[t]he potential benefits of the Heywire program for the local community and even the region, are lost, if not for the long-term, for the short-term" (McKenzie and James 2003,

52). Although McKenzie and James's assessment pertains to the usefulness of Heywire in terms of leadership and regional community development, it indicates that producing sustainable, long term outcomes has been a persistent challenge for this project. Besides the 40 or so winners' attendance at the Summit every year and ABC Radio's broadcast of stories and coverage of the event, Heywire has struggled to demonstrate very visible or tangible outcomes.

Heywire staff have sought to address issues such as these in two key ways: by producing a booklet that summarises the annual Summit and details the project proposals that youth developed and delivered at this event; and through establishing a new partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) (<http://www.frrr.org.au/>) for the creation of a Grants initiative that will enable Summit attendees "to see your dreams become a reality" (Heywire 2014c). Copies of the booklets are given to the Heywire winners who were involved in the Summit, and to Heywire's Government partners. One could surmise that this document's primary usefulness is that it demonstrates Heywire has indeed produced 'outcomes' and that it is deserving of its Government funding. The booklets include short personal statements from young people who describe their personal investment in a topic. Further, through summarising the project proposals, the booklets demonstrate that Heywire has effectively supported youth to identify issues of concern and address them in a way that will potentially benefit regional communities. As such, these booklets serve as a reminder for the Government and for the ABC that the project produces positive, tangible results.

The 'ABC Heywire Youth Innovation Grants' funded by the FRRR offer funding to community organisations which elect to adopt and implement ideas that young people developed at the Heywire Summit in regional communities throughout the country (Heywire 2014c). The Grants program is described on the website and emphasises that Heywire is about young people 'making a difference' and 'bringing their ideas to life'. Like the booklets discussed above, the Grants program is another way through which Heywire seeks to demonstrate its usefulness and relevance to rural and regional youth, and highlight that the project is worthwhile and well-deserving of the time and sponsorship provided by the ABC and Federal Government.

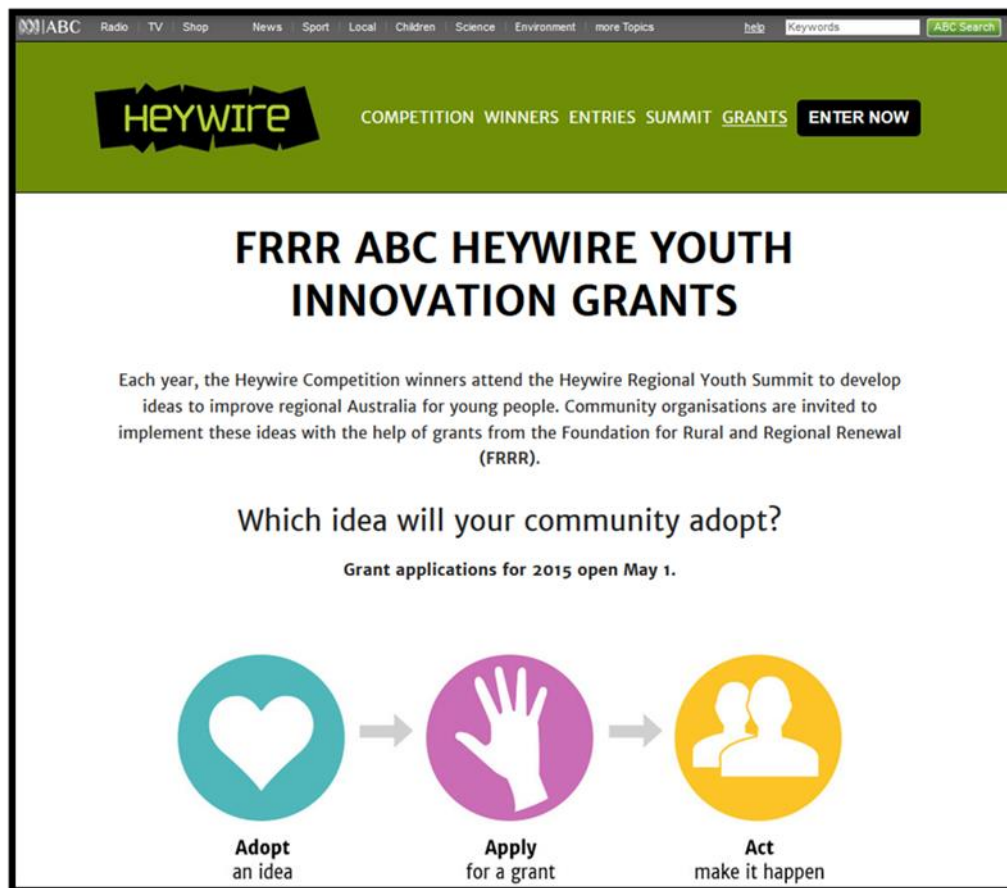


Figure 11: Heywire webpage describing the Grants.

It is interesting that the approach the ABC has taken to emphasising Heywire's worth and highlighting its outcomes has been to further emphasise the Summit and the political aspects of the project, and foreground the ways in which Heywire winners "do great things" (Heywire 2015b). Such a focus conflicts with the ABC's values around audience participation, inclusion, and the ways the Corporation is increasingly seeking to involve ABC audiences as storytellers and content producers. The ABC's growing number of projects that invite its audiences to be the authors of their own stories appear to validate or legitimise "ordinary voices" as valuable and worthwhile. Heywire, however, is in many ways a stark contrast to the approaches to involve the public and amplify their voices demonstrated in these other projects. Heywire has an exclusivity that other ABC projects do not have¹³. By privileging winners' stories and voices and focussing their attention on the

¹³ This is not to imply that the ABC's other participatory projects are not defined by specific aims and agendas, or that these projects enable unmediated self-expression and self-representation. However, I do argue that Heywire is a uniquely exclusive project and underpinned by objectives and

outcomes that can be achieved at the Summit, Heywire undermines its potential to bring new, previously unheard voices and viewpoints to the fore. A problem of Heywire's inherent exclusiveness is that it draws into question the relevance and usefulness of the project for the large and varied group of people who are its target cohort. Arguably, this could be problematic for the Australian PSM institution since participation is now a key part of its public service remit, and a key way through which the Corporation has sought to demonstrate its relevance and importance in a changing media landscape.

Heywire, like digital storytelling projects, strives to amplify ordinary voices and facilitate self-expression and representation amongst individuals of a minority group, yet, the Summit reveals an assumption that self-representational stories and individual voices can and will represent a collective. At the Summit, the personal becomes the general. In part, Heywire can be seen to enable a plurality of voices and viewpoints to emerge and it thus broadens the way the 'category' of rural and regional youth can be perceived and understood. Quite contradictorily, however, at the Summit the multiplicity and diversity of experiences and voices is inevitably reduced. The Summit reveals an interesting clash of objectives within Heywire: in facilitating self-representation, the project enables authoritative or homogenous accounts of young, rural and regional people's lives and identities to be challenged. However, the Summit appears to reverse this function through privileging and promoting of an official voice of rural and regional youth, and expecting this voice to speak for others.

The burden of representation

It is possible that, by its very nature, the Heywire project requires too much from the small stories that young people contribute. A burden of representation is produced through the competition component and selective nature of the winners' Summit because these demand the narratives do something more than simply be the personal expressions and articulations of experience that they inherently are. Through upholding a selection of young people's narratives as more notable, more interesting, or somehow 'better' than others, an

agendas that are rather more complex and conflicting than other ABC projects which bear some semblance to it, such as ABC Open.

official voice of rural and regional youth is produced and promoted – a voice which is, to an extent, expected to speak for others. The ways in which young people’s stories are representative of the experiences and viewpoints of youth in their region, or in rural Australia more widely, is only one element that competition judges look for; however, the fact that the voices and views of competition winners and Summit attendees are privileged and publicised above those of the hundreds of other youth who share stories via this platform means certain voices are heard as representatives who “speak on behalf” of others (Mercer 1990, 65).

The problematic of speaking or ‘standing for’ others is often raised in discussions about the representation of minority or marginalised groups of people. Because minority groups may have limited opportunities or means to represent themselves and their lives, when depictions of their cultures or identities are created, we can run the risk of upholding these representations as being true or symbolic of that group of people as a whole. As Lim states, “minority groups are usually assumed to have the moral authority to speak the ultimate truth about themselves in their self-representation” (Lim 2006, 46). Small, individual stories and expressions and representations of identity are thus encumbered with the anticipation or expectation that they can speak for a broader collective. Furthermore, when certain voices, viewpoints and depictions of individual’s lives and cultures are privileged or upheld, other voices and views, and the specific details of people’s lives and cares are overlooked.

In *Black Art and the Burden of Representation*, Kobena Mercer (1990) discusses the ways ‘black artists’ were cast as representatives who could speak on behalf of and be accountable to their culture and communities. Describing an exhibition of Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain entitled *The Other Story*, Mercer writes that “[a]lthough it was never explicitly voiced, there was a widespread expectation that the exhibition would be ‘representative’ of black art as a whole” (Mercer 1990, 62). He suggests that *The Other Story* offered a rare chance and a space in which black artists could ‘make their voices heard’ (Mercer 1990, 62), and, due to the scarcity of such spaces and the limited opportunities for this group to speak and tell their stories, the exhibition inevitably carried the burden of being representative (ibid, 63). Consequently, the artists were “burdened with the impossible role of speaking as ‘representatives’ in the sense that they are expected to ‘speak for’ the black communities from which they come” (Mercer 1990, 62).

Mercer's discussion of black art and *The Other Story* demonstrates that the burden of representation can be understood on several levels, some of which provide particularly valuable points for consideration in the context of the Heywire project. Firstly, he suggests that if the individuals of a minority group are presented with a rare or single opportunity to voice and represent themselves, there is an urgency to "try and say everything there is to be said, all in one mouthful" (Mercer 1990, 62). This, he argues, was what the "curatorial selection" of *The Other Story* endeavoured to achieve. In some ways, the approach to selecting a certain number of Heywire narratives to broadcast reflects this. If there are only a few platforms from which to make the opinions and concerns of rural and regional youth more widely heard, and only a limited opportunity for this group of people to present these to ministers and Members of Parliament, is it not better to select a sample who can speak on behalf of the group?

As I have suggested, though, privileging some voices over others and subsequently requiring, or allowing, discrete life stories, experiences, and individual voices to speak for others produces a number of problems. For one, it reduces the complexity and multiplicity of voices and views that are expressed on the Heywire website. As Mercer writes of *The Other Story*, the curatorial selection of artwork shown at the exhibition "inevitably simplifies what it seeks to describe and explain precisely because it is impossible to condense and contain such a rich and complex history in one brief burst of discourse" (Mercer 1990, 62). Similarly, by only acknowledging a small number of the personal narratives that young, rural and regional people contribute to Heywire, the project simplifies the diversity of experiences, opinions and ideas that it originally intended to reveal.

Years ago, one of the slogans for Heywire stated "It's not all cockatoos and Akubras", and suggested that sharing personal stories was a way through which rural and regional youth could defy stereotypical representations of their identities, and demonstrate that 'regional youth' is not a homogenous group. A variety of experiences, voices and identities emerge in the narratives that youth create for Heywire. Yet, the very diverse and personal nature of these stories seems to go uncelebrated and, to an extent, unnoticed when a small sample are privileged over the others. The 35-40 Heywire stories that are selected as winning entries do depict diverse ideas and experiences, and Heywire producers and judges appear to value the way these narratives demonstrate the unique backgrounds that these young people come from. Yet, a simplified version of the multitude of ways in which rural and regional youth experience and represent their lives is all that can be offered

when a selection of stories are upheld over others. The problematic of ‘speaking for’ others is still produced simply because – for all the diversity winning narratives might demonstrate – the stories, by their very style, are too personal and particular to their author to be understood as representative of the life experiences and thoughts of others. Most importantly, if we look for discrete life experiences and concerns of a few individuals to stand for those of an identity group of which they happen to be a part, does this serve those individuals an injustice by negating the uniqueness and distinctiveness of their lives and voices?

These considerations draw attention to another level on which the burden of representation can be understood. Mercer, along with numerous cultural studies scholars, argues for the importance of acknowledging the specificity of people’s lives and voices. As Mercer writes, speaking in the role of a ‘representative’ and thus privileging the ‘we’ over the ‘I’ “can disempower others by denying them the specificity of their voices and viewpoint” (Mercer 1990, 72). Within a project such as Heywire, which essentially aims to engage and bring to the fore the ideas, opinions and concerns of a minority group, focusing on upholding the self-expressions and representations of a few seems counterintuitive. Who benefits when this happens? From the storyteller’s perspective, the Heywire project’s functioning as a competition potentially undermines the value that individuals may find in the process of expressing and representing themselves through narrative.

Perhaps privileging the winners’ stories over other Heywire narratives is problematic for everyone – the young people who win the competition and attend the Summit, as well as those who do not. Non-winners may find their voices and views disregarded and the personal benefits they derive from narrating their experiences is therefore limited. For competition winners, perhaps it is “a weighty burden to be perceived as a “true” representative of one’s community” (Lim 2006, 46). Through being checked against detailed and specific judging criteria, are the stories of competition winners encumbered with the impossible task of doing, being, or saying more than the simple articulations and expressions of self that they essentially are? The youth interviewees who I introduce in chapter four reported their experience of winning the Heywire competition and attending the Summit as “empowering” and suggested it was ‘a once in a lifetime experience’; however, young people’s intentions for their stories do not always reflect the ABC’s aims for the project, nor fulfil the criteria against which stories are judged. For instance, Heywire’s youth participants do not always use storytelling or the project’s online platform as tools or places in which they can raise a social issue, or speak in the role of

‘representative’. A philosophical tension between the ABC’s visions for the style and standard of narrative which Heywire will capture, and the authorial intentions of young, rural and regional people becomes apparent.

The personal is political?

The Heywire Summit evidently operates on the assumption that the personal is political, and that the experiences of individuals are representative of those of a collective. When numerous young people share stories of mental health struggles on the Heywire website, and when Heywirers work together at the Summit to develop project proposals that will raise awareness of depression and anxiety in regional communities, such an assumption appears logical. As evidenced in the presentations youth give in Parliament House, and in the booklets Heywire producers compile at the end of each Summit, the personal can be universal, establish a sense of shared experience, and have the capacity to prompt broader change.

According to Poletti, the capacity for the personal story to ‘do the work of the political’ is an important challenge for digital storytelling (2011, 80). She observes that through “coaxing life narrative into the public sphere”, such as occurs in digital storytelling, intimacy is mediated through institutions and this creates a reciprocal relationship between the personal and the collective (Poletti 2011, 81). Poletti indicates that such might be important to the movement’s capacity to contribute to the diversification of voices in the public sphere and affect social change. With reference to Hartley she writes:

digital storytelling needs to be able to be used for more than the communication of personal experience to bring about the ‘emancipation of large numbers of otherwise excluded (or neglected) people’ ... in a way that meaningfully challenges how knowledge is constituted, understood and disseminated through the media (Poletti 2011, 80).

However, in their ambition to challenge traditional relations of power, constructions of knowledge and meaning-making processes, do digital storytelling initiatives and projects like Heywire lose sight of the value of storytelling for the individual and devalue the significance of the singular experience?

Poletti applies Lauren Berlant’s theory of the intimate public to digital storytelling in order to frame the complexity of “coaxing” life narrative into the public sphere. For Berlant, “[t]he autobiographical is not the personal ... all sorts of narratives are read as

autobiographies of collective experience. The personal is the general. Publics presume intimacy” (in Berlant and Prosser 2011, 180). She defines an intimate public as “a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what’s salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection. In an intimate public sphere emotional contact, of a sort, is made” (Berlant 2008, viii).

Poletti proposes that digital storytelling is an example of an intimate public because it creates a sense of shared experience, inclusion, an experience of belonging, and it legitimises “qualities, ways of being, and entire lives that have otherwise been deemed puny or discarded” (2011, 81). For Poletti, there is as such value in recognising the potential universality of the private and the personal. Doing so clearly demonstrates how autobiographical narratives can contribute to the furthering of knowledge about the world (Poletti 2011, 79). However, there is the concern that “the expression, or merely the identification, of the personal gets mistaken for doing the work of the political” (ibid, 80).

Gregg’s (2004) argument for the usefulness of ‘speaking and studying the mundane’ is a counter to these suggestions about the importance of the collective. Gregg suggests there is little to be gained from a generalising or homogenous thesis. Instead, she recommends

moving away from the abstract assumptions to do with an aspiring collectivity ... towards the potential offered in writing ‘singularity’. It is what Massumi (2002, p. 222) calls ‘this-ness’: ‘an unreproducible being-only-itself’ (Gregg 2004, 368).

Gregg reminds us that the very localness and specificity of people’s lives warrants attention, and warns of the insufficiency of “blanket condemnations or celebrations”, generalised or broad-scale arguments for effectively representing the way people experience their lives, their different histories, hopes and agendas (Gregg 2004, 368-369). What projects such as Heywire offer us is a “snapshot of a moment, related by anecdote” (ibid, 369) and an insight into a specific example of ‘how the world is working’ for the storyteller at a particular moment of her or his life. This is the value of such projects, and arguably their primary aim. In inviting individuals to share self-representational stories and ‘open a window into their lives’, these projects uniquely reveal something of the way they understand their experiences. In the case of Heywire, though, the Summit’s establishing an official voice of rural and regional youth means the project errs toward a generalised, more abstract representation and loses – or to some extent discredits – the specificity and

individuality of the experiences that it captures. Some lives and stories are ‘exemplified’ to the exclusion of other lives and stories (Berlant and Prosser 2011, 180).

The stories that rural and regional youth share on the Heywire website do not often *sound* as politically oriented or rigidly activist as the ABC’s aims for the project suggests they might, or as the Judging Criteria requires them to. As chapter five will demonstrate, they are episodic, personable, sentimental and heartfelt. They sometimes probe issues, critique society, and whether they are funny, satirical or painfully sad, they are thoughtful. They are anecdotal, and often fragmentary ‘snapshots’ of an individual’s life story, offering a small glimpse into what young people’s lives are like. The sort of voice that comes through in Heywire stories is an articulation of experience in narrative form.

In *Articulating Experience* (2003) Jason Throop discusses the variety of definitions, understandings and uses of the term ‘experience’ in social theory. He argues that experience is

a structure that encompasses the indeterminate, the fluid, the incoherent, the internal, the disjunctive, the fragmentary, the coherent, the intersubjective, the determinate, the rigid, the external, the cohesive, the conjunctive and the unitary (Throop 2003, 227).

Thinking of the notion of experience as encompassing this range is effective for describing the variety of stories that may be found on the Heywire website. While this research has found that, through the competition, the ABC privileges a particular kind of voice – one that is articulate, coherent, positive, purposeful and educative – describing young people’s narratives as articulations of ‘experience’, as Throop would have it, can serve to equalise them. Furthermore, regarding personal narratives as expressions of experience might enable us to focus more on what the process of expressing and representing oneself in story form may achieve for the individual.

As articulations of experience, and as anecdotal, situated, specific accounts of an individual’s life, personal stories can never ‘speak’ beyond their inherent individuality and subjectivity. To expect them to is to undermine the value of the personal voice and overlook the personal benefits that may be realised through inviting people to share stories about their lives. It is also to devalue the singularity and specificity of the individual experience. Perhaps it is beneficial to no one to look for the political and the universal in personal stories.

Conclusions

The in-depth investigation of Heywire has revealed this project exists at the intersection of numerous, competing agendas, many of which pose some significant challenges to its values of participation and life storytelling. This chapter's exploration of Heywire's funding structure and Government stakeholders, the project's position within the PSM and processes of management, along with the plethora of objectives associated with it, suggests that Heywire is innately fraught with tensions. The move to incorporate user-created content and participation by audiences under the auspices of PSM will inevitably produce challenges in terms of maintaining the integrity of the institution (Hutchinson 2013, 1) and meeting audiences' expectations for a certain quality of content (Thumim 2009, 630). Along with these challenges, Heywire must negotiate the additional complexities produced through its partnership with the Federal Government. The fact Heywire endeavours to simultaneously negotiate the interests of its Government partners while fulfilling its obligations as a PSM-managed project, along with the project's own aspirations to be a platform for self-representational storytelling, prompt questions as to how successfully this project can meet any of its aims, and to what degree it can function as a genuinely participatory platform. Due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders and the need to fulfil some diverse objectives, Heywire seems structurally unsuited to support its rural and regional youth participants to represent their lives and express their voices in a way that is personally useful to these young people.

This chapter identified a number of key areas of tension within the Heywire project: 'good storytelling'; the burden of representation; political agendas, and honouring the personal nature of participants' narratives. The competition and Summit aspects, while fundamental to Heywire, contrast with a number of Heywire's aims and are significantly at odds with the concept of participation, which is now a core value at the ABC. Heywire seeks to facilitate voice, to provide young, rural and regional people with a platform from which to represent their own lives and with an opportunity for youth "to be the authors of their own identities" (Heywire 2011); however, the competition aspect of the project reveals that Heywire prefers and privileges narratives that have a clear purpose, closure, offer a positive representation of rural life, or clearly identify and address issues. Participants whose narratives do not fulfil these criteria appear disregarded or overlooked; their representations and expressions of self are neither acknowledged nor amplified in the same way as competition winners. This marks one of the contradictory aspects of the project, and an aspect that is problematic for fostering participation: through the competition and the

requirement for narratives to fulfil specific criteria, Heywire marks itself as an exclusive project, therefore undermining the values of participation and its own aspirations and potential to provide an inclusive platform for voice and self-representation.

As in digital storytelling, the Heywire project encompasses the possibility of amplifying previous unheard voices and viewpoints and ‘opening a window’ into lives and ways of being that have previously been overlooked. However, as described in chapter two, while Heywire seems effective in facilitating self-expression, its capacity for ‘listening’ is limited. This project seems to diminish its own potential to celebrate or at least acknowledge a multiplicity of voices by promoting an official voice of rural and regional youth – a voice that is to some extent expected to speak for others. A burden of representation is produced through the competition and exclusive nature of the winners’ Summit because these aspects promote a selection of participants’ narratives as though they are representative of *the* voice of rural and regional youth. Heywire’s partnership with the Government and the focus of the Summit means there is a requirement for the personal narratives of the project’s participants to fulfil larger, political agendas. It appears that within Heywire the personal is expected to do the work of the political. This might risk devaluing or overlooking the unique, singular experiences depicted in young people’s stories.

This chapter has explored Heywire at institutional and structural levels and questioned the extent to which the various tensions inherent in the project impact upon its value and usefulness for the youth participants. The next chapter addresses Heywire from a new perspective – that of its participants – to draw out the ways in which the project’s structural features and tensions shape youth participation and impact upon their experiences of storytelling in Heywire.

Chapter 4: The Participants

Heywire's organisational structure outlined in the previous chapter, and the numerous, rather conflicting agendas of its multiple stakeholders might suggest the project has a limited capacity to be truly useful to the rural and regional young people whom it seeks to engage. As Heywire endeavours to fulfil its multiple objectives and meet the larger, institutional requirements of the ABC as well as the Government departments partnered with the project, it would be very possible for the personal intentions of the young storytellers to be overlooked or remain unfulfilled. While the previous chapter demonstrated the ways in which structural and organisational features could limit the project's capacity to effectively facilitate voice and listening, this chapter considers the personal intentions of Heywire's youth participants, and the ways in which these intersect with the overarching aims of the project. As such this chapter addresses the second part of the research question, expanding on the question that guided chapter three, asking: what are the expectations of the participants, and in what ways are these in tandem and at odds with institutional agendas? Many of Heywire's challenges arise from the coming together of multiple agendas, and this chapter shows that the participants, their aims, aspirations, and the factors that guide their storytelling, often conflict with the broader aims of Heywire, thus contributing to the project's complex nature.

This chapter is based on interview data and discusses young people's experiences of Heywire, including some of their intentions for sharing stories and entering the competition, the outcomes they experienced, and the patterns of their involvement. Firstly, I outline the approaches taken to recruiting interviewees and note the difficulties encountered. Secondly, the dominant themes and patterns that emerged in the interviews are outlined, before moving onto a more in depth analysis of the interview data. The themes of the interviews have been organised into a number of sections which discuss participants' authorial intentions for telling stories and entering the competition; the personal outcomes for the participants; and their satisfaction and uncertainties about the project.

The interviewees

Eight rural and regional Heywire storytellers participated in semi-structured interviews for this research. These young people were all part of the 2012 cohort of Heywire competition winners whom I met at the Regional Youth Summit in Canberra in 2013. These interviewees were chosen because they were available and willing to speak about their experiences of Heywire. As shown in the following table, five of the interviews were conducted face to face at the Summit and three via Skype.

<i>Name¹⁴</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Interviewed</i>
Anna	16	F	Summit
Ollie	16	M	Summit
James	17	M	Summit
Jack	18	M	Skype
Evie	18	F	Skype
Beth	21	F	Skype
Tamara	20	F	Summit
Kayla	20	F	Summit

Most interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length, though one was 45 minutes, and two others between 20-25 minutes.

I had specifically intended to interview young people who had demonstrated an unusual use of the Heywire website, whose stories contrasted with the style of narrative that the Heywire project favours, or who had shared a narrative via Heywire but had not won the competition. Storytellers who had used the website more than once and shared

¹⁴ Names of all youth interviewees have been changed to protect the anonymity of these research participants, in accordance with QUT Ethics requirements (research approval number 1200000315).

multiple narratives demonstrate an unusual use of the website; stories which portray rural or regional life negatively, or lack clear purpose or closure are the types of narratives that contrast with the well-structured, 'good story' that Heywire prefers, and that usually win the competition. The existence of these stories illustrate a disconnect within the project; Heywire emphasises the competition, and in doing so fails to recognise other ways in which the platform is being used by young people, and the ways it may be useful to them. The variety of personal narratives that are shared via Heywire, including non-winning and winning story entries, are discussed in chapter five.

While I suspected interviews with competition winners would reveal an overwhelmingly positive experience of Heywire, non-winners would provide a different insight, further reveal tensions within the project, illuminate Heywire's shortcomings, and hence indicate ways the project could be improved. I took a number of approaches to finding non-winners to participate in an interview, the details of which are outlined in Appendix 2. Despite the assistance of Heywire in addition to a number of ABC staff from one of the broadcaster's regional radio stations, it proved very difficult to make contact with young people who had shared stories on the Heywire website but had not won the competition, and hence none of these participants were interviewed.

A key reason it has been so difficult to locate non-winners is that these participants are not the Heywire project's priority. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the ABC focuses its attention on the Heywire competition winners rather than on the other participants who share stories on the website. For the ABC, Heywire is a competition and the project's resources are concentrated on selecting and locating the year's 35-40 competition winners, co-creating their stories for broadcast, interviewing these participants on Local Radio, and facilitating the Summit in Canberra. It is evident that few resources remain to devote to non-winners. A failure to interview non-winning participants has been a limitation of this research, yet it also highlights one of the major limitations of Heywire. The difficulty of finding non-winning interviewees is a reflection of Heywire's failure to recognise their stories, and hence of the project's shortcomings in terms of listening to a variety of voices.

In contrast to non-winners, the Heywire winners are well-known and easily accessible. By the time winners are announced, ABC staff have ensured they have all the necessary personal details of the entrant – such as email, phone number, age and hometown – and have established contact with them. Further, Heywire's Executive

Producer Dan Hirst and Online Producer Jonathan Atkins add Heywire winners to a Facebook group which provides a quick and convenient space for sharing information about the Summit. The Facebook group also enables the winners to maintain the networks and friendships they develop face to face at the Summit long after the event has concluded. By the conclusion of the Summit, Heywire winners have been in close contact with a number of ABC staff for several months, they have been interviewed on ABC Local Radio, and their stories have been featured on ABC Radio and online. These young people become well-known within the ABC divisions that collaborate with Heywire, and, usually, they are easy for the broadcaster to contact.

Although the eight interviewees were all competition winners, their experiences of Heywire were by no means as homogenous as I expected. The interviews revealed a diversity of expectations, intentions and experiences of rural and regional young people's participation in Heywire, and demonstrated ways in which the project is appealing and useful to this group, as well as areas of tension. Since these interviewees were selected on the basis of their accessibility and willingness to participate in this research, the interviews discussed in this chapter are not necessarily representative of the majority of Heywire storytellers. In general, these interviews represent a high-impact, mostly positive experience of the Heywire project; the experiences of non-winners – of whom none were interviewed – are doubtless significantly different. Despite the universally positive tone of the interviews, the participants' intentions for their storytelling, and the outcomes they experienced as a result of their participation were varied. The interviews revealed some diverse understandings of Heywire and some unexpected insights into how the project is experienced by its target cohort. They demonstrated that, at times, the appeal of Heywire for youth and the outcomes of their participation differ from the ABC's and Heywire facilitators' visions of the project's usefulness.

The interviews

The findings from the youth interviews can be classified around a number of topics and general themes. Common reasons for sharing stories on the Heywire website and entering the competition included the desire for a voice on their own terms and an opportunity to express an opinion; and a platform for representing their lives and communities. In contrast to these individual, youth-driven motivations, adult encouragement also emerged as a major motivation for five of the eight interviewees. Regardless of their initial reasons for

creating and sharing a Heywire story, in general, the interviewees indicated they valued having a platform for sharing narratives about their lives and for representing themselves in the way they wanted to be seen by others. 'Being heard', increased self-confidence and a sense of shared experience emerged as common personal outcomes that came of participating in Heywire.

All interviewees had been uncertain of what to expect from the Heywire Summit and had only a limited idea of what this event would involve, yet they all described it as a very positive experience. Despite this, few interviewees had any intention of using the Heywire website again, either for sharing their own stories or viewing other people's. While most had found the Heywire website and the Summit experience worthwhile, their usage of Heywire as a platform for narrative self-representation was a one-off and they did not see it as having any long-term usefulness to them. Although the same can be noted of numerous digital storytelling initiatives that have short-term goals and outcomes, Heywire has in the past endeavoured to be an online community that youth could 'belong' to and participate in for the long term. The interviews confirmed findings noted earlier in this thesis that sustaining participation has always been a struggle for Heywire; yet they also revealed that this is not necessarily problematic, since young people still found value through sharing a singular story.

A voice on one's own terms

I asked all participants how they had learned about Heywire and what they understood about the project before they entered the competition. For Jack and Tamara, the idea that Heywire was an opportunity and space in which they could have a voice on their own terms was an important part of how they envisaged the project. Getting one's story or opinion "out there" was an important reason for their entering the competition, and both felt a great deal of personal satisfaction for simply having a space for self-expression.

Jack is 18 years old and learned about Heywire through a school friend who had won the competition the previous year. During our Skype interview he described: "the way I saw it, it was just a chance to actually get your story out there and to give people the chance to get to know you and hear what you have to say" (interview, December 2013). Self-expression, along with the idea of honest or authentic self-representation emerged as prevalent themes in Jack's understanding of Heywire, mirroring the centrality such ideas

are in the logic of projects such as these. Projects like Heywire, Capture Wales and London's Voices invite people to share their own self-representational stories, and there is the suggestion that these self-representations are more real, or more authentic, than representations of people's lives delivered by journalists (Thumim 2009, 623). The Heywire slogan "rural and regional youth telling it like it is" is an explicit statement that the stories are self-representational, and that the project therefore offers an authentic account of young people's rural lives.

To represent himself authentically and give others an insight into 'who I am' was an important part of Jack's motivation to enter Heywire. He told me:

Well, all through primary school and high school I was actually um, quite, I was that sort of kid who just sat at the back of the classroom and didn't really want to know anyone. Well, in primary school there was an issue with bullying and everything, so I just sort of saw it [Heywire] as my opportunity to get heard and seen for who I am.

For Jack, Heywire appears to have offered a 'safe space' where he could describe his life, including the experiences that have frightened him, as well as personal difficulties he is proud to have overcome. Specifically, his story is about recovering from "a severe and rare eye disease", and his love of hip hop dancing. He says that his story "was specifically written for Heywire but I just sort of wrote it for anything really. Just to get it out there". Importantly, Heywire presented an opportunity and a platform where such self-expression and self-representation could take place.

Jack's account of his experiences reveal a productive tension within Heywire. As in digital storytelling, the storytellers' sense of safety was important to their feeling they could express and represent themselves honestly, openly, and with depth (Mackay and Heck 2013, 96). Lambert indicates that providing people with a safe space for storytelling and story sharing is one of the principles of digital storytelling: "People open up and share their stories when they are provided an environment where they feel that their ideas will be valued, their stories have resonance, and they feel safe" (Lambert 2009, 86). Some instances of digital storytelling, such as the BBC's Capture Wales project, specified that the process of storytelling was not a safe one for participants because their stories would be published and shared with strangers (Meadows and Kidd 2009, 102). Heywire, by contrast, has specifically striven to make the website a "safe and protected space – a space for young people to interact freely" through sharing stories about their lives (Sadov 2009, 3).

Like Jack, 22 year-old Beth also appears to have experienced Heywire as a safe space for storytelling. In our Skype interview she echoed some ideas about voice that emerged in other interviews, stating “Heywire gives a voice to young rural Australians, when we might not have a chance otherwise”. Beth’s response to my question of what she meant by ‘voice’ revealed her feelings that Heywire was ‘safe’ in the sense that her story would be accepted in that space: “Just an honest opinion, um, you know, whatever you say can’t really be judged because we’re just telling it how it is, I s’pose. We just want it to be raw and simple”. It appears that for both Beth and Jack, the value of Heywire was that it offered a non-judgmental space in which they could be ‘real’, and ‘truly’ themselves. Similar to Burgess’s observation of digital storytelling, for these participants Heywire stories were a means genuine self-expression and self-representation, and therefore a means of “becoming real” to others (Burgess 2006, 211).

The features of digital stories, and of narratives such as those created and shared via Heywire, naturally convey a sense of authenticity, truth and sincerity. Since this is a medium through which people represent themselves and tell their stories in their own voices, they appear to promise a truthful account. As Thumim notes, there is the implication that digital stories are highly authentic accounts of people’s lives, precisely because they are self-representational (Thumim 2009, 623). However, it can be argued that a digital story is in fact an inauthentic representation of the author’s life because it only reveals a facet or façade of his or her lived experience (Hertzberg Kaare and Lundby in Lundby 2008, 119); furthermore, as will be discussed further in chapter five, digital stories and Heywire stories are co-created narratives, and the way the way storytellers represent their lives and identities are mediated by numerous factors. Hence, such narratives cannot necessarily be understood as ‘accurate’ accounts.

The important point in the context of Heywire, though, is that, for the storytellers, the invitation to share narratives provided an opportunity for them to represent themselves in a way that they felt was authentic. Arthur Frank argues that “authenticity is created in the process of storytelling” (2002, 109). He suggests that, from the perspective of the storyteller, narrating one’s experiences “means that events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living. Being narratable implies value and attributes reality” (Frank 2002, 111). It seems that such was true for Jack who framed his participation in Heywire as an opportunity to be “heard and seen for who I am”. Through narrating his experiences of school, of hip hop dancing and of overcoming a rare eye disease, Jack

constructed a self-representation that he regarded as highly authentic, and in the way he wanted to be seen by others.

Similar to Jack, Tamara found Heywire a useful and convenient space for meaningful self-expression. I interviewed Tamara in Canberra during the Heywire Summit. She told me she had heard the competition advertised on triple j, “asking for young rural youth to go out and express their opinions on Heywire. So I went onto the website and that was purely because I was frustrated and wanted to get my opinion out there” (interview, February 2013). Tamara describes that at the time the Heywire competition was being advertised she was upset by the way mining had changed her hometown in regional Queensland. Tamara is 20 years old and finding it difficult to live and feel at home in her local town. She says that when she heard about Heywire and accessed the website, she knew exactly what she wanted to say:

It was about the impact of the mining and gas boom in Chinchilla and just so, the fact that house prices have skyrocketed. Like, for renting it's, for someone who's not in the mining boom the rents is quite ridiculous and it's quite hard to find a rental.

Interviewer: And so your story is about that?

Tamara: Yeah, and sort of about just feeling uncomfortable going into a pub, and just the men in the pub just looking at you kind of thing, and yeah. (Shakes her head.) It's not a nice feeling. I know you can't do much about that, but.

Tamara's original Heywire story was a text piece of about 200 words and she suggests her use of the Heywire website was spontaneous. She did not take a great deal of time to consider, craft, or polish her story; rather, “it was spur of the moment. I did edit it three times after that but yes”. Tamara characterises her use of the Heywire website as impulsive, yet her comment that she edited her narrative contribution indicates she was acutely aware that it would be seen by others, and she wanted to ensure her message was comprehensible.

Contrary to the celebratory claims that have been made about new media, and the affordances these provide for youth voice and self-representation, Tamara suggested that opportunities for sharing one's opinion remain scarce. Tamara uses social media and has a Facebook account, yet it did not occur to her to share her “rant” on her Facebook page. Instead, she discovered Heywire, which according to the triple j advertisement she had heard, specifically invited her to share her opinion. She says “before I entered, I just

thought it was a great opportunity for me to voice my opinion, and I find sometimes that you feel as though you can't, and so this was a good outlet". Tamara's sense that Heywire would be an appropriate platform and "outlet" for her opinion is indicative of a core, valuable difference between this project and social media. Heywire, as a narrative platform that explicitly invites the stories and opinions of regional youth, evidently has an appeal different from media such as Facebook.

Tamara's comments echo some broader discussions about voice, and in particular the challenge of 'being heard'. She appeared to have a certain understanding of or expectations around the idea of voice since, despite having access to the internet and participating in social media, she described feeling that she could not always voice her opinions. Tamara's descriptions of how Heywire appealed to her speak to claims that while there are ample platforms for voice, there are fewer opportunities for "gaining a voice that matters" (Macnamara 2013, 165-166). Jim Macnamara summarises that the internet, and particularly social media, "have provided plurality and plenty in voice"; however, the internet does not guarantee an audience who listens (Macnamara 2013, 165-166). As Couldry phrases it, "having a voice is never enough. I need to know that my voice matters" (Couldry 2010, 1). In order to 'matter', voice must have an audience (Macnamara 2013, 160). For Tamara, Heywire appears to have fulfilled a unique function: it *invited* her to express her opinion which suggested that her opinion would *matter* on this platform – an idea that was further confirmed by her certainty that "at least one person would have to read it". In her mind, Heywire was not only an opportunity for expressing her views, but also for gaining an audience.

The Heywire project's promise to "give voice" reflects broader discussions about the democratising potentials of new, digital technologies. Increasing people's capacity for voice, and as a result expanding the range of voices and viewpoints that can be registered in the public domain, is touted as one of the most important affordances of digital technologies (Couldry 2008, 386-387; Crawford 2009, 2011; Macnamara 2013, 160,164). Additionally, facilitating voice, especially amongst groups of people who have traditionally lacked the resources for expressing and representing their own lives, has always been one of the core objectives of digital storytelling. However, a number of scholars such as Dreher (2010, 2012), Crawford (2009, 2011), Couldry (2010), Tacchi (2010, 2012) and Macnamara (2013) warn that while emphasis has been on 'having a voice' and 'having your say', the important corollary to voice – listening or hearing – has received significantly less attention in both popular and academic literature (Macnamara 2013, 161). Crawford writes that

voice has been privileged as the prime form of participation online, but “what has happened to its metaphoric counterpart of listening? The concept has been overlooked as a critical element of online participation” (Crawford 2011, 63). Echoing Dreher’s (2012) concern that digital storytelling initiatives over-celebrate processes of “speaking up”, Tacchi also emphasises the importance of ‘listening’ with reference to the Finding a Voice digital storytelling project, arguing that voice must be valued, or heard, rather than merely facilitated (Tacchi 2010, 2012, 655).

Heywire appears to recognise listening as the vital corollary to voice since, via the Summit, it ensures that “Heywire puts young Australians at the centre of the conversations that shape their communities” (Heywire 2015a), and this event enables some voices to be heard. However, the selective nature of the Summit and competition mean that listening is only achieved for a small number of participants. For young people who share a story via Heywire but do not win the competition nor attend the Summit, Heywire certainly facilitates their self-expression and self-representation, but it fails markedly to listen to their voices.

Experiences of listening and audience

Having an audience for their stories, opinions and ideas was vital to the Heywire participants I interviewed. In their minds, ‘having a voice’ appeared intrinsically linked with the idea of being heard, echoing Couldry’s definition of voice as “the implicitly linked practices of speaking and listening, based in a practice of mutual recognition” (2009, 580). Similar to Tamara, 16 year-old Anna equated voice with listening. Yet, in contrast to Jack and Tamara, Anna’s motivation for storytelling had nothing to do with her own desire for an authentic voice or an aim to express an opinion. As will be outlined in the next section of this chapter, adult encouragement was the primary motivation for Anna’s involvement in Heywire. Nonetheless, her comments about the outcomes she experienced as a result of entering and winning the competition revealed she correlated voice with recognition. I asked Anna how it felt to have her story noticed, to which she replied: “it made me feel like I do have a voice because a lot of the time, being a younger sister of someone with a disability, I feel I’m always kind of put to the side? It was always about my sister (pause). So it was like I was being heard for once.”

Anna's comments echo the rhetoric about voice and self-representation that is prominent in the ways the Heywire project is promoted, and in the ways Heywire producers and young people who have won the competition talk about its purpose and value. Since I interviewed Anna during the Heywire Summit in Canberra it is not surprising she spoke about 'having a voice' and how she benefitted from the opportunity to represent herself through her story. Many of the speeches by ABC staff and Federal Ministers who take part in the Summit discuss the importance of Heywire in terms of voice. At the February 2013 Summit, for instance, the Corporation's managing director Mark Scott addressed the Heywire winners and MPs during the morning tea at Parliament House. Voice was a key theme in his speech. The ABC was committed to providing people with ways to participate in a national conversation and voice their opinion, he said, and the great thing about Heywire was that it provided rural and regional youth with a voice.

The idea of voice emerges continuously throughout the week-long Summit, and young people are frequently told that Heywire is 'a great opportunity', and that it 'gives youth a voice'. These ideas subsequently become central to how participants describe their Heywire experience, as evidenced by how often my youth interviewees used the term voice. It seems likely that in our interview Anna was more or less unconsciously reiterating the discourse that was so prevalent throughout the week. At the same time, though, it is clear she genuinely valued being 'heard' or noticed. While the Heywire project and the Summit are fuelled by a rather abstract idea of voice, Anna was able to apply it to her own experience. She equated the idea of voice with 'being heard' or noticed by having her story recognised through Heywire – a feeling that she suggests was unusual for her.

For Heywire participants, the promise of an audience, recognition and listening is one of the features of the project that renders it unique and attractive. While the project emphasises 'giving voice' as its dominant role and value, it is more accurately the provision of an audience that is both a primary motivation for young people's participation, as well as a major outcome. Seven of the eight interviewees described using other forms of new media – most universally, Facebook – and it is clear that online self-expression and self-representation is an everyday practice for them. However, their descriptions of their experiences of Heywire indicated that this platform fulfilled a unique function by guaranteeing an audience. The experiences of the interviewees aligned with claims that the internet provides ample opportunities for voice, but not necessarily for being heard (Macnamara 2013, 165-166). Couldry describes this as "a contemporary crisis of voice" (2010, 1), by which he means a "recognition crisis" (Couldry in Macnamara 2013, 163).

Similarly, Dreher urges that attendance to the processes and politics of ‘listening’ in addition to ‘speaking’ is vital if opportunities for voice are to be meaningful (Dreher 2012, 2010). The sense that it was difficult to be noticed or heard was a strong theme in both Tamara’s and Anna’s accounts of their participation. For these interviewees, winning the Heywire competition and having their stories broadcast on ABC Local Radio meant that their voices received recognition.

Few interviewees had a clear idea who would see or hear their stories, and yet none of them thought they were writing into a void. Their certainty that their narratives would be noticed by someone was a motivation for storytelling. Kate Crawford notes that “listeners are necessary to provoke disclosures of any kind” (Crawford 2009, 529), and this has certainly been the case with Heywire. The storyteller’s concept of their audience – however vague this seemed or inaccurate it turned out to be – was also important in shaping their self-representations. As boyd notes, understanding the scope of one’s audience is necessary for representing oneself appropriately (in Buckingham 2008, 131). While the audience for mediated self-representations is most often invisible, and “anyone can potentially read or view a digital artefact, we need a more specific conception of audience than ‘anyone’ to choose the language, cultural references, style, and so on that comprise online identity presentation” (Marwick and boyd 2011, 115). In the absence of precise knowledge about audience, people take cues from the media environment to imagine who will see their self-presentations (ibid).

For many interviewees, the way in which they ‘imagined audience’ created the intention behind their participation in Heywire, and they authored their identities in accordance with their idea of ‘who’ would see or hear their narratives. Similar to the personal homepage creators Marwick and boyd (2011) refer to, the majority of Heywire participants interviewed for this research “thought of their work as constructed for the public” (Marwick and boyd 2011, 115). While people tend to imagine their social media audiences as limited and bounded (ibid), the Heywire participants conceptualised their audience on the Heywire platform much more broadly. It is clear that because they did not know who, precisely, would see or hear their narratives, the participants took cues from the way they understood Heywire’s purpose.

The interviewees conceptualised their audience for their Heywire stories in some diverse ways. Tamara developed her understanding that Heywire was a platform from which she could articulate her opinion through hearing Heywire advertised on triple j. She

describes that she did not know who would read her story, or what would happen after she had shared it on the website, but she says “I just wanted it to be heard. It was just a relief. I didn’t really think about it afterwards, like I was – but it just felt good to put it somewhere. And I knew at least one person would have to read it. And that made me happy”. It is clear from Tamara’s story that the ‘one person’ she imagined was an audience who did not fit within her social network of friends, family or peers. As will be described in greater depth in chapter five, Tamara clearly intended for her story, or, as she calls it, her “rant”, to inform an unknowing audience of the negative impacts mining companies have had on her rural town. Her original Heywire entry was brief and it did not offer many personal details about her life, nor is the narrative intimate, touching, or warm as digital stories tend to be (Burgess 2006, 209-211). Rather, it is angry, abrupt, and it is evident Tamara was venting her frustration.

16 year-old Ollie was another interviewee who was unsure who would read his story, or of the outcomes he would experience as a result of sharing a narrative on the website. He simply said:

I really hope that people do read these stories. People in the regional community, in like rural and regional communities, I hope they do read it because they’re so different from each other and it’s just so awesome ... and I thought it’d be really great to show other communities that this is what is going on here.

Ollie’s words reflect arguments that storytelling is a central feature of communication (Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 10; Langellier and Peterson 2004, 101), and a process involving storytellers as well as “storylisteners” (Sunwolf, Frey and Keränen 2008).

In addition to understanding the scope of one’s audience (boyd in Buckingham 2008, 131), participants’ understanding of Heywire’s aims was important to their determining what stories to share. Some interviewees referred to the criteria for Heywire stories, or described their attempts to determine which kinds of stories were suitable for the website and competition. Ollie, for example, said that he would share another story he had already written “if it’d fit the criteria”. Evie also described she “looked around a bit and sort of got the feel for what people, like, sort of put up there”. While Evie felt “you can pretty much write any story on there”, Ollie’s comments suggested a more precise understanding of what kinds of stories were suitable for Heywire. Ollie referred to his community frequently in our interview and said that he “wanted to get across the community spirit” in his story. He appeared to understand Heywire as a platform for sharing stories that portray

something special or unique about where he lives. Such an understanding aligns neatly with how Heywire facilitators intend the website will be used. Some of the prompting questions on the website ask: “what makes your town unique? Why do you like living where you do?” (Heywire 2013b) While Ollie had not noticed these prompts or any of the Heywire’s other *Tips for a great entry* he appears to have inferred that Heywire was a platform for positive stories about rural and regional communities.

Other young people suggested that they only really understood the purpose of Heywire, and therefore what sort of stories they ‘should’ have told, after winning the competition. For example, in their comments about the sorts of stories they might share via Heywire, and in the sorts they ‘should’ have shared, both Kayla and James reveal some differences in the way Heywire is presented to youth and in how they come to understand the project after the Summit.

16 year-old James’s winning Heywire story was about his Dad who is a soldier posted in Afghanistan, the challenges he and his family endure while they wait nervously for each phone call, and the emptiness they feel each Christmas and birthday he is not with them. Narratives such as James’s, which depict challenges and personal experiences honestly and unreservedly, and reveal something unique or interesting about the individual’s life are common to the digital storytelling ‘genre’ and also effectively meet the ABC’s aims for the style of narrative that Heywire will capture. However, James indicated that if he was to share more stories on the Heywire website they would not necessarily be like his winning narrative but would instead depict turning points and lessons he had learned. He suggested that attending the Summit and reading other participants’ winning entries enabled him to establish a clear idea of the sorts of stories the ABC favoured.

Interviewer: So have you looked at many other people’s stories?

James: Um, I read a couple last night when I was in my room ‘cause I didn’t actually read many people’s [prior to the Summit]. I read mine and Brook Mason’s and I was sitting in the room and I thought I’d read a couple on my laptop and some of them were really inspiring.

Interviewer: In what kind of way?

James: Um, well Luke’s about being lost in the bush for five days is a bit, ah, it puts it into your mind that it’s scary but amazing at the same time that they survived five days off rotten meat.

Interviewer: Oh wow. And so you do you think you’d keep using the website to, like, share stories or read other people’s?

James: Um I think I would keep using to share stories but not to actually read other people's if that makes sense?

Interviewer: Yep. So what other stories do you have to tell that you'd like other people to know about?

James: Probably my car crash story and my broken back story, about how I overcame the doctor's saying "you'll never walk again". So those two stories would be good to tell.

Interviewer: Why particularly those stories?

James: Um the drink driving one's real close to me. That's probably the worst accident I've ever had, involving me who was drink driving and I want to try and get that word spread, but when I broke my back the doctors told me I'd never walk again and I was in a wheelchair for 8 months before I started walking at 10 months, properly, and then at 12 months I was a national rugby player for Australia. And I'd love to get that around there that don't give up. 'cause I never gave up. I kept trying to walk, fall, get back up, and I'd try again. Just don't give up on your dreams is probably the best thing to say. Keep moving forward.

James's admiration of Luke's story, and his ideas for other stories he might share indicate he had developed a clear idea that Heywire stories 'should' depict out of the ordinary, life-changing experiences. His ideas for future stories reveal that, in retrospect, he understood the Heywire platform 'better'. He had developed a clearer idea of who might read his stories and of the influence Heywire narratives could have to shape other people's understanding and affect change. Since the Summit asks young people to develop ideas for positive change, and to address issues that are important to them, it is understandable that participants come to know Heywire as a platform for sharing stories that raise awareness of important issues, such as drink driving, or for narratives that might inspire or give hope to others.

Similar to James, Kayla indicated that it was only after attending the Summit that she understood what Heywire was 'really about' and hence the sort of story she 'should' have told. I interviewed Kayla at the Summit, during which she told me about a number of initiatives she works on that aim to bring rural people together in spite of the vast distances that separate them. She says "the projects and that that I do are all about building the community spirit" and described one of her initiatives, the Durum Downs Ladies Day, which enables rural women to gather and connect. She appeared surprised in herself for not having written about the Ladies Day or her passion for "building the community spirit" in

her Heywire story, but attributed this to the fact she did not understand Heywire adequately at the time she entered the competition.

Interviewer: So did you talk about these initiatives in your original Heywire story?

Kayla: No, no I didn't mention this, because I don't think – that's perhaps where I really didn't know the whole, I guess, the aims of the project. I thought it was more about telling a – Well I guess it could have fitted there – it's still telling something great about your community – but yeah mine was just more of a story and a message. A narrative more than anything else.

Kayla's uncertainty further highlights some of the ambiguity in how Heywire is described and represented to participants. It was clear in our interview that Kayla had doubts about how well her winning story adhered to the aims of the Heywire project. She expressed a concern that her story was not about issues. Kayla indicates she originally understood Heywire as a space for "telling something great about your community" – an understanding she must have developed through seeing or hearing the competition advertised. However, after attending the Summit, her view of Heywire's purpose shifted. Her words suggest she began to understand Heywire as an opportunity to create positive change in regional and rural communities. In her comment "that's perhaps where I really didn't know the whole, I guess, the aims of the project", Kayla indicates that, in retrospect, she feels she should have written about the ways she has contributed to "building the community spirit" because this would be suited to the aims of Heywire.

The vagueness interviewees expressed about their audience, their uncertainty about Heywire's aims and their confusion the possible outcomes of their participation reveals a lack of transparency in how Heywire is presented to participants. To some extent, this opacity is intentional. As Hirst described to me at the 2013 Summit, the event is most effective if young people do not arrive with too many preconceived ideas. The Summit has a clearly defined process: facilitators guide young people to identify issues of concern, and participants work in groups to develop ideas for positive change. Such a process would be disrupted if the 35-40 participants came to the Summit with their own ideas about the issues they wanted to address and outcomes they hoped to achieve at the event (Hirst, personal conversation, February 2013). Justine McSweeney, the first official coordinator of Heywire whom I introduced in chapter three, offered a different perspective. According to McSweeney, social media has become essential to Heywire because, via Facebook, each year's Heywire cohort can get to know each other and begin to raise and discuss ideas

before they even arrive at the Summit. As McSweeney told me at the Summit, “so much work gets done before they even get here” (McSweeney, personal conversation, February 2013).

From observing the Heywire website, it is evident producers endeavour to negotiate between these two views: it is important to provide enough information about ‘what is Heywire’ so rural and regional youth have an incentive to participate; however, as Hirst indicated, it is also important not to give too many details about what the Summit involves. Despite these efforts to provide participants with an appropriate amount of information, several interviewees still indicated a considerable degree of uncertainty about Heywire. In some cases, this appears to have been because they did not explore the website or read the information it provided. For Kayla and Ollie, though, it seems the information given was still inadequate for enabling them to establish a clear idea of who would read their stories, and what the purpose and value of the Summit might be.

Heywire appears to have recognised this lack of transparency and, in recent months, sought to rectify it through changes to the website. Since July 2014, the website has included less text, more images, and the information about the Heywire competition and Summit is more easily locatable via hyperlinks from the homepage. The updated website is simpler to navigate and descriptions of the competition and Summit are more concise. For example, the ‘Heywire Regional Youth Summit’ webpage comprises six main sub-headings, including “BE HEARD”, “MAKE A DIFFERENCE”, and “SWEET DIGS” which correspond with one photograph, and are followed by one to-the-point sentence, such as “Have your say about issues that matter to you and be heard by politicians, youth organisations and on the ABC”, and “Develop ideas to improve life for young people in regional Australia. Then see your ideas become a reality through our grants program” (Heywire 2014c). This information is general and does not describe, specifically, the nature of day to day participation in Heywire; however, it makes the major themes and intentions of the project clear. It is possible that future Heywire participants who explore this platform will enter the competition with a clearer idea of what their participation involves.

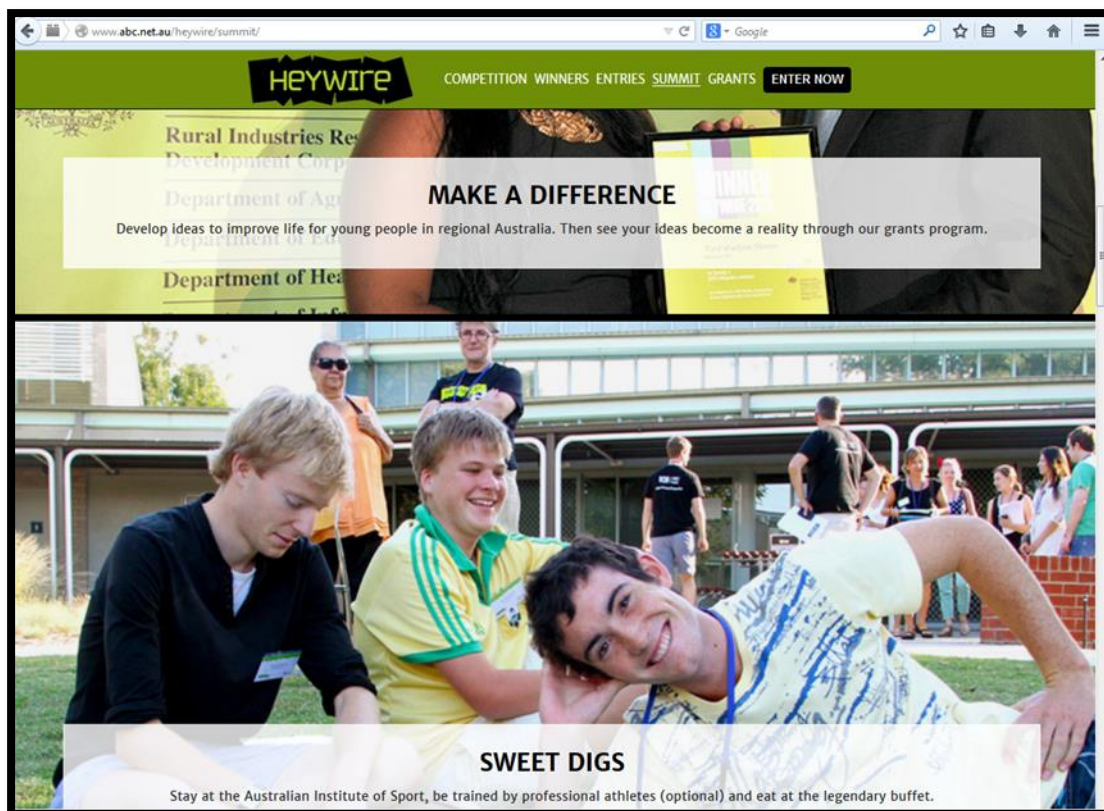


Figure 12: Descriptions of the Summit.

Adult encouragement

Although the ABC claims that Heywire represents and amplifies youth voice, adult involvement has always been important to the project's obtaining competition entries. The interviews revealed that more often than not it was adults, and not the youth cohort that Heywire targets, who had a clear idea of what the Heywire project was, how to enter the competition, and the sorts of stories it preferred. This finding is not altogether surprising. The ABC's market research demonstrates that older adults, as opposed to the 16-22 year-old cohort that Heywire targets, constitute the majority of the ABC's audience (McNair 2014). It can hence be argued that adults, more so than youth, will hear the competition advertised on ABC Local Radio and listen to the winning stories that are broadcast. While the competition is advertised on "the ABC's national youth radio network", triple j (ABC 2013a), the project's main media coverage is through the ABC Local Radio networks whose dominant audience is adults. The interviews confirmed these ideas by revealing that many participants' knowledge about the project and motivations for entering came from adults.

Five interviewees acknowledged adult encouragement as a significant reason for their entering the competition, and of these five, three were encouraged or in some way

assisted by their school teachers and university tutors. Since this is a third of all winners interviewed for this thesis, it seems that Heywire's connections with educators are an important and effective method of acquiring stories.

This finding contrasts with Heywire's intentions to promote youth autonomy, "empower young people to address their problems" (Sadov 2009, 4) and function as a "space for young people to interact freely" (ibid, 3); it is also at odds with other youth and new media research, most of which indicates that a key, appealing feature of new media for young people is that these offer an alternative to the spaces that are controlled by the adult authorities in their lives (Ito et al. 2010, 22-23; boyd in Buckingham 2008, 134). Social media, online gaming, in addition to sites that enable young people to create and share media content are popular 'hang outs' for this cohort, partially because they provide opportunities "for peer-based learning and interaction that are not reliant on adult oversight and guidance" (Ito et al. 2010, 22-23). In contrast, participation in Heywire is heavily reliant on the very adult authorities that youth use other media to escape from. The involvement of school teachers, university tutors and parents – in addition to ABC staff members – factored considerably for a number of interviewees.

The interviewees for whom Heywire had been a part of school had also gone on to win the competition, suggesting that stories created under teacher guidance often successfully meet the ABC's visions for the style of voice that Heywire will capture. Since Heywire stories are often created as a part of assessment, teachers are likely to guide their students to tell a 'good story', encourage them to think of turning points, to identify issues that are important to them, and the experiences that have shaped them. While none of the youth interviewees said they had seen the webpages of *Tips for a great entry*, one could surmise that their teachers are familiar with the ABC's guidelines, make use of the downloadable *Heywire Secondary Teaching Notes*, and so have a clear idea of the style of narrative that is preferred in the Heywire project. Additionally, although few of the young people interviewed listened to ABC Local Radio and therefore had not heard winning Heywire stories broadcast, many said that their older family members, teachers and other acquaintances listened to Heywire stories on the radio. Clearly, then, adults are more likely than youth to be familiar with the warm tone, sincerity, and purposefulness that characterise winning Heywire stories. While Heywire is a youth project and storytelling space, many young people's understanding of and participation in the project is almost entirely shaped by adults.

The involvement of adults is a further example of the discrepancies between Heywire's claims and its outcomes. The ABC professes that Heywire stories are "the voice of regional youth"; however, similar to Thornham and McFarlane's (2014) observations of youth content in BBC Blast, Heywire narratives are not always 'evidence' of autonomous participation, where youth can be seen to be sharing stories at their own discretion and in order to fulfil their own intentions as storytellers and media producers. As Thornham and McFarlane note, the actions of creating and uploading, and the content that is visible, are evidence of "much more than an act of (one way) creation (into/onto the technology)"; rather, the content must be understood as only one small element of a larger, more complex process of negotiated production (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 197). Such observations are reflected in Heywire. As became strongly apparent in the interviews I discuss below, Heywire narratives are "an outcome of contextually specific and negotiated relations" (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 197), between young people and their teachers, parents and friends, in addition to the affordances of the Heywire platform and agendas of ABC staff.

Unlike Jack and Tamara, who had purely personal reasons for sharing stories on the Heywire website, James and Anna created and entered their Heywire stories for school. 16 year-old Anna learned about Heywire through her English teacher who made 'enter Heywire' part of the classwork. While Anna says she had a look at the Heywire website before she wrote her own story, she claims not to have seen the 'Tips' pages or suggestions for storytelling. Instead, her understanding of Heywire and the style of storytelling it invites was shaped entirely by her English teacher. Anna explained that she and her classmates "just kind of got left with written up stuff that our teacher gave us and that's it. We were told to write about something that means a lot to us, and that would give us the chance of displaying how we feel against an issue, I guess" (interview, February 2013).

Anna enjoys her English lessons, and to reflect on an issue and write about her personal feelings was not an unusual task for the subject. "I kind of write my ideas a lot at school in English. It's one of my favourite subjects. I think that's the only time I really get to write about how I feel about certain issues and stuff within the world", she says. Yet, her description of how her class was prompted to write their Heywire stories contradicts the notion that Heywire stories are evidence of youth engagement and that the project facilitates the expression of youth voice and self-representation, apparently on their own terms.

As is the case in workshop-based digital storytelling, Heywire is not a neutral platform for storytelling and self-representation but rather a space in which narrative processes and self-representations are institutionally coordinated. The institution, its agendas, and the style of facilitation it provides shape people's participation in the project as well as the project's outcomes. Self-representation in digital storytelling projects, and likewise in projects such as Heywire, are mediated – that is, enabled, constrained, and shaped by – numerous factors and processes including the personal objectives of participants, the affordances and limitations of the technologies, and the requirements and expectations of the facilitating institution (Thumim 2012, 54). Lara Worcester emphasises that digital storytelling “is not about solo work. It is a process involving multiple actors that must negotiate the rules of narrating a digital story and the organisation's intentions in supporting the workshop” (Worcester 2012, 91). Similarly, Lisa Dush reminds us of the importance of understanding digital storytelling as “an *embedded* practice, one that happens within institutions and is mediated by institutional values and discourses” (Dush 2013, 627-628), rather than as a neutral, transferable process.

This point applies equally to Heywire. Furthermore, in Heywire, the ABC is not the only institution whose agendas are at play and whose objectives mediate young people's participation. As emerged in Anna's account of her participation, school, and the ideas and agendas of Anna's teacher shaped students' involvement in the project, and also the outcomes in terms of the kinds of stories they created. As Anna described:

Anna: We just got handed a piece of paper with some instructions on it, just saying that this is a really good opportunity and to take it if you want it. And we just got told what to write about pretty much.

Interviewer: In what way?

Anna: Like um, we were told to write about something that means something to you, something that will get your opinion across.

Evidently, then, Anna's use of the Heywire website is not wholly indicative of youth agency, since her motivations for creating and sharing a Heywire story did not arise from her individual desire to express her views and represent her life. Rather, the intentions of others – specifically, Anna's English teacher – had an integral role in shaping participation.

Like Anna, 16 year-old James also wrote his Heywire story as part of school. However, unlike Anna, James had not known anything about the Heywire project; rather, his English teacher had submitted his story to the competition without his knowledge. I met

James at the Summit in Canberra, where I asked him what his initial reaction had been when he received the phone call from the ABC telling him he had won the competition. He laughed and said “what is Heywire? They were my first thoughts. And then um it was ‘oh yeah, I’ve won something for once, and I’m not a complete stuff up!’” James explained that his teacher had given the class an assignment asking them to write a story, and then selected three of her students’ narratives to enter into the Heywire competition. He describes that the assignment “just kind of said write a story about something personal that’s happened to you. And, um, she said just give it in and make sure it’s real personal and detailed”.

Interviewer: So how did you choose what story to tell?

James: I didn’t really know what I was going to write? I just kind of writ a *whole* lot of words and a whole story then I kind of took it down a bit and tried to make it make sense ‘cause it was just a whole bunch of blab.

Interviewer: So what was your story about, in the end? Could you describe it to me?

James: I guess because Dad was leaving for Afghanistan in a couple of weeks and I thought I might write about my Dad because I don’t do much with him. So yeah, that kind of inspired me to write it about him.

Not having known anything at all about Heywire at the time of composing his narrative, James’s foremost aim for his story had simply been to get a good grade in English. He says that he usually dislikes schoolwork “‘cause my spelling’s stuffed”; however, winning the Heywire competition had increased his sense of self-worth and awareness of his own capabilities. Such is evident in James’s comment that the fact he had won something meant he wasn’t “a complete stuff up”, and in his description of the Heywire Summit, which he had enjoyed immensely.

Despite the positive outcomes James experienced as a result of winning Heywire, his participation in the project was only minimal, diminished by the involvement of his teacher. That the decision to enter Heywire was not his own is problematic. Young people’s knowledge of Heywire and their ideas about the project’s purpose inevitably shape their intentions for their participation and their decisions about what story to share. James’s hopes for his story, such as what message he wanted to impart and to whom, and how he wanted to represent himself to others might have been different had he known that his story would be uploaded onto a website and potentially seen by many people other than his English teacher. Not having known about Heywire, James did not have the opportunity

to decide whether, why, or to what degree he might like to participate in the project, nor could he develop any expectations about what he hoped would come of his storytelling.

The ABC's move to involve audiences must begin with enabling individuals to decide whether or not they will participate. In Heywire, enabling youth to make decisions such as those described above is an integral part of the project. The Heywire project endeavours to enable youth to identify issues that affect them and develop ideas for change (McKenzie and James 2003, vii; Heywire 2014c), to be the creators of their own stories (Sadov 2009, 4), the authors of their own identities (Heywire 2011), and to voice their own opinions (Sadov 2009, 4). The project clearly intends that participants for Heywire will be self-selecting (Hirst, interview, October 2012), that youth will make their own decisions about the stories they tell and the ways they represent their lives. However, such intentions are impeded by a number of factors, such as the ABC's needs for Heywire to meet larger institutional objectives, as well as those of the Federal Government sponsors. As can be seen in James's experience of Heywire, another impediment is the involvement of adults which, while well-meaning, diminish the degree of participation young people can experience by removing some of the important decision-making opportunities from the process.

Self-representation

Some interviewees reported that the desire to represent their own lives and communities and give other people some insight into their lives in regional towns and on rural properties was their primary reason for entering the competition. Self-representation and voice are two closely linked motivations for, and outcomes of, sharing personal stories; however, in my interviews these emerged as quite separate motivations. For instance, while Jack and Tamara described wanting 'to be seen for who I am' and had used storytelling on the Heywire website to express their own ideas and opinions, Ollie and Kayla framed their participation around a desire to represent their worlds and show other people what their lives are like. In this section, I use the interview transcripts to allow these participants to speak in their own voices, with as few interruptions as possible, about their experiences of Heywire and its value to them.

Kayla is a 20 year-old woman working as a governess on a remote cattle station in western Queensland. She did not grow up in the area, but has spent some time 'outback' as

a governess to two children who do school of the air. It's a lifestyle and a community she has come to love. I interviewed Kayla at the Summit in Canberra and asked her to describe her story and her Heywire experience. She summarised her winning entry broadly, stating: "I guess it was really about celebrating rural areas and the community spirit that's in rural areas. Um, so I guess the brilliant sense of community that I think underlines nearly every rural town and village." Kayla said she could not remember how she found out about the competition – perhaps it was in the paper or on the radio – but she felt motivated to enter because she wanted to show others how enjoyable her rural lifestyle was.

Kayla: I was feeling really passionate at the time about telling people about the amazing opportunities that are in western Queensland or in rural areas and, um, that had faced a lot of negative perceptions. People would come out and visit the station, you know, and they'd be 'oh what's a young girl like you doing out here?' or they'd be asking 'why the hell would you want to live here?' Um. You know, 'it's the best time of your life – you're wasting it – you should be in Paris!' (laughs) I really wanted to tell people how brilliant rural and remote Australia is.

Interviewer: How did you understand Heywire when you found out about it?

Kayla: I thought it was about telling a story I guess about – you know, it was something I felt so passionate about and I thought 'oh this is fantastic, this is an opportunity to share this story with, you know, with so many people' and Heywire would be a good platform for that.

Kayla didn't spend much time on the Heywire website when she entered her story. She created a username and filled in only mandatory fields on her profile page¹⁵ before uploading her text story and photograph. She describes,

One night, in a moment of inspiration I did a little draft thing and the day it was due just thought 'oh it's actually due today. I'd better put that up'. So I just uploaded it onto the website, but I've been so busy with so many things happening that I really didn't engage with the website much.

She did, however, read about the prize for winning the Heywire competition and the Summit, but says that this did not excite her.

¹⁵ All interviewees were involved in Heywire in 2012-2013 and therefore experienced the functionality of the old website, which enabled them to create a profile page and comment on other participants' stories.

Interviewer: What did you think the Summit would be like? Like what did you think you would actually do here?

Kayla: I guess from, um, looking at the little bit I read about it, it said a visit to the war memorial, a visit to the ABC studios – but I, um, had a trip booked overseas and um, I thought ‘oh the Summit, you know, I’m not really too excited about seeing museums in Canberra’ (laughs). It’s not really why I entered.

Kayla made it clear that she had accessed and used the Heywire website as a means of showing other people what she enjoyed about living in western Queensland. Other than celebrating her rural lifestyle through her narrative and telling people “how brilliant rural and remote Australia is”, Kayla appears to have had little concept of what she would gain from sharing her story. Since the description of the winners’ trip to Canberra did not appeal to her and she was planning to be on an overseas holiday during the Summit week in February, it is evident that the possibility of winning the competition did not factor as an incentive for her storytelling. Instead, Kayla’s motivation was her own passion for where she lived and her desire to impart something of this to others.

Kayla’s story was highly celebratory, and – despite her initial reluctance to attend the Summit – she valued her experience of winning the Heywire competition. However, Kayla was also the only interviewee who expressed some deep uncertainties about Heywire and scepticism about the overall usefulness of the project. Referring to the Summit and the project proposals Heywire winners had developed throughout the week, she said:

I don’t think realistically, being realistic, I don’t think it’s viable to think that – look at me, I’m about to cut down some brilliant ideas (laughs) – but I don’t think it’s viable to think that these groups are going to carry anything through, as in, as a group.

Interviewer: Okay. Why not?

Kayla: Um? Maybe this is wrong to say. I don’t know. I don’t know. I just don’t think, like the FRRR grants – that is a brilliant way for communities to apply for that to shape those ideas for how could it fit, and how could we do it in our community, so it’s great that youth have put those ideas out there. They’ve proposed some solutions and at least it’s an opportunity for communities. I don’t know. Sorry. Maybe if there’s enough passion within the group and motivated members of the group that have a bit of experience, and if the group has guidance or something, and works with an organisation or something and collaborates, but, I don’t know. Do you think – what do you think?

Interviewer: I don't know. I think that you have a good point being, well, just being unsure like that. But I'm interested in why initially were you going to say 'I don't think it's going to work'?

Kayla: Okay. I just don't think – and I know there's no expectations for this – but you wouldn't be able to expect that those projects – 'cause I don't think that – oh, how do you say it? I think that we've been given a great set of skills over the week, and this set of skills have all been about pitching ideas and things like that, and obviously there's another set of skills associated with carrying through the ideas and continuing to work on it, so I guess that with mentoring and that's been great this week, having the mentoring and those sort of things. So perhaps with support – I don't know – maybe I'm being really cynical – but I think it's. I don't know.

Evidently, Kayla valued the experience and was pleased that she had attended the Summit in spite of her initial reluctance. Yet, she clearly had reservations about the long-term usefulness of Heywire – a concern that the project itself appears to have and be striving to address. As discussed in chapter three, the new partnership Heywire has established with the FRRR and the grants initiative this organisation offers Heywire participants is one significant way in which Heywire is striving to deliver tangible, lasting outcomes.

By emphasising the Summit as the singular most useful feature of Heywire, the project appears to overlook its uniqueness and possible value as a platform for rural and regional youth to share stories about their everyday lives and to tell others about the place and community in which they live. As was evidenced in Kayla's account of her participation, the appeal of Heywire was in its provision of a platform for representing her life to others. She understood that via Heywire her story would reach "so many people", suggesting she imagined she would have an audience. It seems that the possibility of having an audience prompted Kayla's storytelling, reflecting Crawford's notion that listeners are an essential for self-disclosure (2009, 529). While Heywire's emphasis is on the Summit and this event is clearly an enjoyable, rewarding experience for the youth attendees, representing one's life and expressing one's views on a platform that provides an audience was also a valuable experience.

16 year-old Ollie offered a similarly favourable depiction of rural life and communities in his story about 'The Pink Moustache Squad', the women who run his local football club. In our interview at the Canberra Summit, Ollie echoed many of Kayla's sentiments about the "community spirit" in rural and regional areas. While he had not known about Heywire before some adult acquaintances told him about the competition

and encouraged him to enter, Ollie constructed his narrative by himself, in his own time and not as a part of school or workshop. He describes:

A couple of members of my community came up to me in the lead up to Heywire and they gave me the Heywire postcard and said 'look, I really think you'd have a good story to share for this' and so I put it in my room with a little, I don't know, a Post-it in my room and I had it sitting there for a while and the deadline was coming up so I thought 'you know what, I owe it to these people who thought I could do this' and so I decided to share my story on Heywire.

Interviewer: Uh huh, and so what sort of community members were these?

Ollie: Um, there was one who is, um, a member of our local shire, and then there was a school teacher.

Similar to Kayla, Ollie summarised his story in broad terms, describing its focus as "the community spirit". He framed his intentionality for his storytelling around wanting to recognise the work of the volunteers who work behind the scenes of his football club. For Ollie, the story was "really important to tell" because he felt the women and young people who helped were rarely acknowledged or thanked for their efforts. Unlike Tamara, whose storytelling on Heywire was quite impulsive, Ollie indicates that he spent quite some time deciding on which story to tell and on how best to tell it.

Ollie: Um, I think because of having it [the Heywire postcard] in my room I was constantly reflecting on what I could share, of what I have to give to this website and I thought, it's not often talked about like behind the scenes, like I've never ever read a story of a football club, you know. It can be funny, it can be humble, it can be sort of all those lovely community things and so I thought that's what small communities mean to me. Yeah, so I really wanted to get across the community spirit and how great it was that the women work uncredited and that we get along so well. And there's always a helping hand around when you need it which is really, um, great, so when structuring [my story] I sort of thought I really want to get that across.

While Ollie had been prompted to enter Heywire by adults he, like Kayla, had created his story based on his passion for his town and community, and with the intention of showing others what he thought was a little known aspect of life. Such intentions and the celebratory, educative style of narrative that Kayla and Ollie shared fit neatly with the ABC's intentions for the Heywire project. In their stories Ollie and Kayla revealed themselves as positive, happy young people who understood and valued their respective communities, and as precisely the type of people who Heywire best supports to 'have a voice'. The ABC's role in shaping such self-representations appears implicit in both these

cases. Neither Kayla nor Ollie had noticed the website's tips or suggestions for how to tell a Heywire story, nor read any other people's stories before uploading their own; however, both had seen or heard the competition's advertising material which asks youth to 'tell it like it is' and describe life in rural and regional Australia. It is clear that for Ollie and Kayla 'telling it like it is' meant showing others the aspects of rural life they enjoyed and felt were rewarding. Their delivery of the highly positive style of narrative that Heywire prefers cannot be entirely attributed to the shaping role of the ABC; nonetheless, the photographs of smiling teens that Ollie and Kayla would have seen on the Heywire website, along with the upbeat tone of the ABC's advertising would have confirmed to both storytellers that Heywire was a suitable platform for the sorts of stories they wanted to tell.

Although both Ollie and Kayla found Heywire useful as a platform on which to represent their lives, the interviews with these storytellers confirmed that the Heywire website was not a platform they used frequently, and not a space that would be useful to them in the future. Kayla, for example, said that she did not see the website as having a lasting value to her. She had filled in the mandatory sections of her profile page but specifies that her primary reason for using the website was "just to upload my story and to enter it into the competition". She indicates she did not find the website particularly useful beyond this, and she said she was unlikely to use it again either to share her own stories or read other people's. Observations of the website and interviews with other young people indicate that these feelings are not unusual; for most users, the Heywire website is useful only as an avenue for uploading a story and entering the competition. Although Kayla had not read any other stories on the website, she said "it's a great reference point and it's got a great collection of stories there, and so I think that, you know, it could be used as a selling point for the competition".

One of the purposes of the Heywire website is to provide some information about the competition and so be an incentive for youth to enter. However, Kayla indicated that, in its current state, the website did not provide any appealing or useful information about the Summit. Kayla had been very reluctant to attend the Summit, thinking it might be "a repeat of year 6 camp!" While she did attend the event and said she valued the opportunity to network with MPs, members of RIRDC, and to form connections with people who might one day be useful to her, the potential value of Heywire was not made clear on the website. Kayla articulated some of the problems she saw with the Heywire website and the way the project was pitched to youth:

If you tell someone to go online and upload your story, you think ‘oh who’s going to read that?’ So I think maybe more work could be done. Certainly, I can write you a testimonial, I can rave now and go on about what this competition does and, you know, the brilliance of it, but I certainly wasn’t nearly aware of that.

For Tamara, Heywire had been a useful platform from which to express her opinion and release her frustration. She uploaded her story during her first visit to the website, and did not access it again until after she found out she had won the competition. James, Beth and Ollie described a similar use of the website. Like Tamara, they had used it to share their own story and then not accessed it again until they learned they were competition winners. Then, driven by curiosity, wanting to know more about the competition they had just won, as well as the other storytellers who they would meet at the Summit in Canberra, Tamara, Beth, James and Ollie visited the Heywire website for the purpose of reading other people’s stories. These young people described they enjoyed reading other narratives on the website and indicated they valued learning about other young people’s lives. Ollie described that after winning the Heywire competition he visited the website and began reading the Heywire stories of other people who lived in his region:

I got to read some amazing stories firsthand which really made me think ‘if these are *on* Heywire, why aren’t I reading them more often?’ And so then I felt really privileged to win our region after reading them and it’s so cool to keep hearing rural stories which aren’t often mentioned and if they are it’s normally about farming, which is not all that a small community has to offer.

His comments suggest he valued that the stories he read revealed a diversity of lives and lifestyles of his local town and community. While agriculture is a major industry in Ollie’s region, he enjoyed that the stories he read weren’t all about farming.

Despite his enjoyment of Heywire stories Ollie admitted that he was unlikely to use the website again, partially because he thought he would be too busy.

I don’t want to say I’m busy because busy changes for everyone and I think that I’d need motivation to really get into it. If I had a story that I’d, um, already written I would definitely chuck that up, because, the effort’s already done and if it’d fit the criteria that’d be a good idea, but, um, no, I don’t think I would keep using the site which is a really – it’s a sad thing to say.

Most other interviewees responded similarly: sharing a story on the Heywire website was something they had done once, but they did not think they would do it again, or at least not on a regular basis.

It is not surprising that young people's use of Heywire is one-off; Heywire does not function effectively as a communicative space in which young people can interact, and, other than winning the competition, storytellers receive no obvious reward for participating. The architecture of the website means they cannot tell who, if anyone, has seen their narrative contributions and so it is understandable that participation on this platform is mostly a one-off rather than sustained practice. As Heywire facilitators have noted, the most effective, useful function of the Heywire platform is as an avenue for young people to enter the Heywire competition (Hirst, interview, 2012), and as a repository for their stories (McSweeney, interview, 2012).

The interviewees' description of their usage of Heywire highlights several differences between this platform and other mediated spaces that youth use for self-representation. For instance, while young people tend to transition fluidly between mediated and unmediated environments such as Facebook, online gaming, and face to face interaction with their peers (Gray 2009, 16; boyd in Ito et al. 2010, 84), this is not the case with Heywire. Furthermore, there was no crossover between their use of Heywire for storytelling and their use of other mediated platforms. Young people had shared their stories on Heywire only, and not on personal blogs, social media, or other websites. Such is an indication of Heywire's uniqueness, and of its potential to be useful to regional youth simply as a platform for narrative, rather than as a competition or Regional Youth Summit. As a space that invites narratives and appears to promise an audience, youth find they can use Heywire in ways different from social media, blogs and YouTube.

Youth use Heywire as a platform for sharing personal anecdotes and opinions, stories that they want other people to hear, and content that does not appear to belong anywhere else. As emerged in my interview with Beth, Heywire was a space for sharing a story that was significant to her. Reflecting the themes that emerged in the interview with Jack, she suggested that Heywire was a platform for 'honest' or 'truthful' self-representation, which meant it was different from social media. Comparing Heywire with Facebook she said:

On Heywire you're telling a story because you want people to know about something whereas with Facebook and online media you put up posts and you put up photos you want people to see; you want people to think that you're some... You put yourself on a different stand, I s'pose. You make yourself look prettier, or... You know, people do it, they make themselves look more handsome or... you know, more attractive I s'pose, and more... um... what's the word? Successful I s'pose. Whereas with Heywire you're

just being yourself and that's the best part about it, you know, where you're just telling a story that's close to you and by doing that you're going to touch other people (interview, December 2013).

For Beth, Heywire was an opportunity and space for her to share fond memories of summer holidays at her grandparents' house in rural Tottenham and describe the more sorrowful, recent days she sat by her grandmother's deathbed singing to her as she died. In style, Beth's story is confessional and deeply personal. It is a very significant story for Beth and she said she valued having somewhere to tell it. Her comments that through narrative she might "touch" or connect with others mirror the narrative theory that is discussed in the next chapter, including the notion that storytelling is fundamentally a discursive, social act (Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 10), and a process that is "central to our capacity to symbolise experience, both to ourselves, and to other human beings" (Concalves et al. in Angus and McLeod 2004, 103).

Beth was the only interviewee who made direct comparisons between the Heywire website and other platforms young people use for self-expression and self-representation; yet the idea that Heywire invited a different style of participation, self-representation and expression appeared to be shared by all interviewees, evidenced in the way their stories were created for and shared via Heywire only, and not via any other media.

Shared experience and belonging

From my informal conversations with Heywire competition winners at the 2013 Summit and my observations of the event, it is clear that the forming of new friendships was a positive outcome for the vast majority of the attendees. James and Evie both emphasised that the other young people they had met at the Summit and the friends they had made was one of the most rewarding outcomes of their participation. Other interviewees reported that they experienced a sense of belonging, shared experience, and common understanding. Both Evie and Beth, for example, used the phrase "in the same boat" a number of times to describe the connection and sense of like-mindedness they felt towards the other Heywire winners. Essentially, Heywire constructed for them an "intimate public" (Berlant 2008; Poletti 2011).

For Evie and Beth, Heywire offered "an experience of inclusion and community building which 'flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain kind of experience of belonging'" (Poletti 2011, 81). Through its use

of personal stories to identify experiences that are commonly shared by rural and regional youth, the Heywire project constructs the symbiotic relationship between the personal and the collective that is at the heart of Berlant's (2008) theory of the intimate public. As Berlant describes,

What makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff already share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly historical experience ... participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived history (Berlant 2008, viii).

Through inviting young people who share an identity category – that of 'rural' or 'regional', 'youth', and 'Australian' – to create and share stories about their lives, Heywire, as a storytelling platform, begins to foster a sense of commonality, collectivity and like-mindedness. As Evie described her experience of meeting other participants at the Summit, "it was good 'cause you can get along with them so well because they're also from somewhere rural and you can relate to them a lot whereas you get city-slicker kids (laughs) and they just haven't got a clue about the whole rural thing!" She appeared to feel she shared a history, a lifestyle and identity with other Heywire winners. True to Berlant's (2008, viii) description, Heywire creates a public which, while constituted by strangers, can be described as "intimate" because its participants experience a sense of recognition and of belonging to a group or collective.

While a sense of belonging and collective experience may be fostered on the Heywire website as participants read stories from other young, rural and regional Australians and contribute their own narratives to the space, Evie's comments suggest these are further developed and more keenly experienced at the Summit. During the week in Canberra, participants' personal stories become starting points for larger conversations about issues and concerns that are commonly experienced by rural, regional and remote young Australians. Reflecting on the Summit and the circles activity, during which all Heywirers wrote an issue of concern to them on a circle of paper and placed it in the middle of the room, Evie said:

People didn't really have different opinions. They were all kind of in the same boat so to speak. So uh, yeah it was pretty good. ...if someone put down things like bullying, and you know, everyone feels the same pretty much. The same emotion and, and um, all, basically all the people had the same experience of being bullied or helping someone through the time of being bullied.

Later in our interview, Evie described the hours she spent with group members deciding on a topic or issue that would be the focus of their presentation in Parliament House. She said:

Nobody argued at all (laughs). ... I was quite amazed that although we were all from different food industries and the majority of them [her other group members] were farmers and I was a fisherman, even that difference – we were all pretty much in the same boat. I keep saying that. Why do I keep saying that? (laughs) But basically we all had similar issues, but they were, even though they were different industries.

Evie continued to emphasise themes of shared emotions and like-mindedness throughout our interview indicating that, for this participant at least, Heywire had effectively been a space of intimacy and belonging.

The sense of being “in the same boat” and the experience of belonging that Evie described reveals a complex relationship between the Heywire project, its participants, and this research. One of Heywire’s aims is to engage and amplify youth voices and reflect the diversity of their lives, yet participants such as Evie demonstrate that an achievement of the project is not always the reflection of diversity but rather of sameness. One of the findings of this research is that Heywire captures a multiplicity of voices and experiences, but largely fails to acknowledge the majority of its storytellers and the diversity of their voices. Again, though, the experiences of participants such as Evie draw attention to the possible value of fostering a sense of sameness. A strength of Heywire is its ability to encompass such a mix of seemingly contradictory possibilities; yet, these contradictions are also an example of missed opportunities within the project since, in fostering intimacy, a sense of shared experience and belonging, Heywire often fails to acknowledge or celebrate the diversity of youth voices it engages.

Fostering a sense of belonging and community amongst young people from rural and regional parts of Australia are amongst the objectives that some of Heywire’s partners have for the project. The *Evaluating Heywire* report mentions a sense of belonging, along with “pride in being ‘rural’” (McKenzie and James 2003, vii) amongst the intended deliverables of the Heywire project. Since this report was commissioned and published by RIRDC, one of Heywire’s main and most long term partners and sponsors, it can be assumed that enabling young people “to express their pride” (McKenzie and James 2003, vii) and feel a sense of attachment to and belonging within their rural communities (ibid, 6) reflect this authority’s interests in Heywire. As described in chapter three, Heywire is one of a number of projects that RIRDC invests in in order to “develop leadership and human capacity in primary industries and rural communities” (RIRDC 2012, 137). ‘Youth programs’ such as Heywire empower young people by giving them a sense of responsibility, and provide a sense of belonging (McKenzie and James 2003, 6). According to McKenzie and James, “the

result will not only aid in community development, but it will also aid in retaining the youth populations” (2003, 6), an outcome that aligns with RIRDC’s overarching aims to invest in research and development programs that lead to “a more profitable, sustainable and dynamic rural sector” (RIRDC 2014).

While there are clear benefits to creating an intimate public, and Heywire winners such as Evie valued feeling “we were all pretty much in the same boat”, the strong sense of belonging and shared worldviews fostered through Heywire can potentially have negative consequences. For example, strengthening feelings of connection and community between rural and regional young people could emphasise the distance and lack of understanding this cohort feels exists between them and their urban counterparts.

‘City versus country’ is a common theme in Heywire stories, and a topic, or issue of concern that has emerged for discussion at many Heywire Summits. At the 2012 Summit, for instance, a group of Heywire winners proposed an idea for a “student swap” where ‘city students’ were invited to visit rural towns in an effort to “help close the gap between urban and rural youth” (Heywire 2012). The feeling that there is a ‘gap’ or divide between rural and urban people emerged in the interviews with Evie, as well as Beth. Both these interviewees made an explicit comparison between urban people and rural people. Evie, for instance, said she could relate to the other winners who participated in the Summit with her because “they’re also from somewhere rural”. Similarly, Beth described that one of the aspects of Heywire she enjoyed was that it was “rural based”, presumably as opposed to urban-centric. She said:

I feel like rural kids, like we’re the backbone of Australian society and we do see a lot more than, you know, city people, I think, and stuff like that. And it’s quite tough out there I s’pose. Like, not everything is handed to us on a platter. You know, we haven’t got three choices of schools we can go to if we don’t like one of them, you know, we have one school only and you have to go to it (interview, December 2013).

In self-identifying as ‘rural kids’, and drawing a distinction between this identity and ‘city people’ or ‘city-slicker kids’, Beth and Evie emphasised the ‘us and them’ or ‘city versus country’ dichotomy that Heywire participants so frequently identify as a problem. Heywire both recognises and capitalises on this dichotomy, and endeavours to make it a productive one. Through focussing explicitly on rural and regional experiences, the project fosters a sense of self-worth, pride, and belonging with like-minded others.

The sense of like-mindedness that Evie and Beth articulated was also shared by Ollie. For Ollie, the ‘ruralness’ of Heywire was in part what he valued about the project. “I really like what Heywire stands for” he said. “It’s so cool to keep hearing rural stories which aren’t often mentioned.” Since the project invites participation exclusively from rural and regional young people, all the narratives on the website depicted lifestyles, interests and concerns that these participants could to some extent relate to, and the winners who met at the Summit felt they had something in common. When I asked Beth whether there was anything she would like to tell other people about Heywire she made some general comments about the process of storytelling, such as “everybody has a story, no matter where you’re from, and people are so alike. Like we’re all in the same boat and everything, and I s’pose through storytelling we do realise how close we all are and everything”. Presumably, Beth was referring to her experience of Heywire and the connection she felt to the other young, rural people whom she had met at the Summit.

Self-confidence

The majority of Heywire interviewees indicated that the project encouraged them to feel that their lives were interesting and their stories and opinions were important. Echoing Burgess’s observations that “[i]f nothing else, initiatives like digital storytelling can instil a degree of confidence in one’s life story as unique, and as worth telling” (Burgess 2006, 211), having their stories noticed by the ABC and broadcast on the radio was a validating experience for competition winners. 18 year-old Evie, for example, valued the recognition she received for her story about living and working on her family’s Spanish mackerel trawler. She said:

I guess, ah, it makes you feel like you’re not just, say, another ant in the anthill on the world, basically; you’re not just one little person doing their job that nobody really knows about, its – yeah – you got your story out there and people have another little idea about fishing and about who you are, and it gets you out there.

Evie also described that her father was very proud of her and enjoyed showing her professionally produced Heywire story to his friends and colleagues in the fishing industry. This indicates that, for Evie, Heywire resulted in recognition and listening not only from the ABC, but also from her family and friends.

In addition to experiencing Heywire as a platform on which to “give people the chance to get to know you”, Jack indicated he experienced an increased sense of self-confidence as a result of winning the Heywire competition. He described that things had changed for him since winning Heywire, including his aspirations for the future. Jack is currently studying secondary education at university. He stated that if he had not won Heywire, he may not have continued with his studies or pursued his love of hip hop dancing because “I would not have felt as confident in myself. I personally think that if it wasn’t for Heywire I wouldn’t have stayed in [university] for as long as I did because I was terrified of public speaking before I started uni”. Being a Heywire winner involves a significant amount of public speaking. Youth are required to make presentations in front of MPs at Parliament House, and participate in a number of interviews for ABC Radio. It is likely that these activities, along with the overall experience of being a ‘Heywired’ supported Jack’s developing confidence. Although Heywire’s privileging of the competition and its winners are in many ways profoundly problematic, Jack’s comments indicate that, for winners, the project does achieve the important result of encouraging young people to feel that their lives and voices are valued.

The attention that Heywire winners receive, such as through having their stories broadcast on ABC Radio, interviews with reporters, their participation at the Summit, and their interactions with Federal MPs results in an increased sense of self-worth for most participants. As McKenzie and James concluded from their interviews with Heywire winners in 2003, the Heywire Youth Issues Forum, as the Summit was previously known, gave participants “a confidence boost” (McKenzie and James 2003, 32) and an opportunity to appreciate self-worth (ibid, viii). The interview with Jack corroborates these conclusions. As Jack summarises: “I came from being this person who dropped out of the School Captain elections because I couldn’t do the speech in front of the school to the person who stood up and did the speech at the Summit with no issues.” The parallel between Jack’s words and McKenzie and James’ conclusions that Heywire has the potential to increase participants’ self-confidence (2003, 10) is an indication of the enduring importance of the Heywire Summit to the project, and of the centrality of this event in Heywire’s capacity to produce tangible outcomes. Despite the ways in which Heywire has evolved over the years as the ABC has sought to reinvent itself to suit a digitised media landscape, Heywire’s offline, physical presence remains vital to the project’s functionality and usefulness.

Heywire’s dependence on the Summit and the project’s physical presence reflects the continued centrality of the ‘story circle’ and workshops to the practice of digital

storytelling. Some researchers have argued that the current, highly dynamic, digitised media environment means that that we should now reimagine the form and process of digital storytelling (see for example Fulwiler and Middleton 2012; Couldry 2008; Alexander 2011). Nonetheless, contemporary literature and ‘how to’ guides for digital storytelling continue to privilege it as a workshop-based practice (see for example Alexander 2011). This indicates that the story-making, story-sharing process is most effective when it is social, communal and face to face, and reinforcing ideas that storytelling is necessarily a social process (Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 10). Similarly, Heywire’s effectiveness in terms of acknowledging and amplifying youth voices, fostering self-confidence and enabling its participants to feel their voices are valued are dependent on the project’s face to face, physical component. A problem of this dependency, not only for Heywire but for digital storytelling more broadly, is that the benefits of such initiatives are limited to those whose participation is physical and face to face. In the case of Heywire, youth who share stories but do not win the competition will miss out on the majority – if not all – of the project’s potential benefits.

All Heywire storytellers who participated in the research for this thesis had attended the Summit at the time of the interview, and it is as such difficult to accurately gauge the outcomes of Heywire for those who did not attend the Summit. Since non-winners do not have their stories professionally produced by ABC staff nor broadcast on the radio, and they are not raised to the almost celebrity status of Heywire winners, it is logical to assume that these young people do not experience significant outcomes from their engagement with the project. For example, while winning the competition, attending the Summit, being interviewed on ABC Radio and being asked to express ideas and opinions in Parliament House can be self-affirming experiences for the young people whose stories are selected as winning entries, non-winners do not receive such recognition for their storytelling. While Heywire winners may feel their voices are heard and valued, it is unlikely non-winners will feel they have gained anything significant from sharing their personal stories via this platform. For these storytellers, Heywire might seem to have failed on its promise to “give voice” since the project did not acknowledge their narratives. For Heywire, overlooking the majority of the stories and voices it engages represents a missed opportunity to facilitate voice in a way that is meaningful.

Conclusions

The interviewees were very enthusiastic, confident, certain of their opinions, and, as competition winners, they had become used to speaking about their Heywire experience, having participated in a number of interviews for ABC Local Radio and given presentations in Parliament House. As such, the interviewees who participated in this research are not necessarily representative of the majority of youth who share narratives on the Heywire website; rather, they represent a particular type of Heywire storyteller, and the interviews analysed in this chapter reveal a particular, mostly high-impact and positive experience of the Heywire project. While non-winners were not interviewed for this research, it is highly likely their experiences of Heywire are significantly different.

Although the interviews revealed an almost universally positive attitude towards Heywire, the participants' satisfaction was more complex than this. The interviews supported arguments made throughout this thesis that Heywire is a project and platform of competing agendas; however, they revealed that this isn't always problematic for the participants. The question posed at the beginning of this chapter – what are the expectations of the participants, and in what ways are these in tandem and at odds with institutional agendas? – can thus be answered: while the expectations and intentions of participants combine with institutional agendas in both contradictory and complementary ways, Heywire's capacity for meaningful participation depends not only on how well the agendas of youth intersect with those of the ABC but on the capacity for young people to repurpose the affordances of this project to find their own meanings. Young people's accounts of their participation revealed that they found benefits of participating in Heywire that were different from the project's own claims about its usefulness. For instance, while the Heywire project frames the Summit and 'making a difference' as its most valuable and unique aspects, the youth interviews revealed that some participants experienced Heywire as a 'safe space' for representing oneself authentically. This is an example of one of the productive tensions of Heywire, and an instance where young people can be seen to be creating their own meanings and finding the platform valuable outside of the ways intended by the institution.

The interviews revealed that, as a narrative platform, Heywire has the capacity to occupy a singular space for rural and regional youth: while the project has in the past striven to align itself with platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, the features that render it different from these other spaces are part of its usefulness. Heywire enabled its

participants to represent themselves and their lives narratively, and demonstrate the ways they understand their rural lives and their place within their communities. Further, through winning the competition, having their stories broadcast on ABC Local Radio, and attending the Summit, young people felt their stories were heard and their lives and opinions were valued. It is important to note that such outcomes are exclusive to competition winners. Without undermining the value of Heywire for these participants and the personal outcomes they derived from 'being heard', a limitation of Heywire is that non-winners are unlikely to find that Heywire facilitates 'listening' or acknowledgment.

In general, the personal outcomes of young people's participation in Heywire included the sense of "being heard for once"; a sense of shared experience along with the forming of new friendships and connections; and increased self-confidence. Since interviews were conducted either during or after the 2013 Summit, it is not surprising that voice, friendship, and shared experiences were common themes. All the interviewees had experienced Heywire as the Summit, during which they had made new friends with whom they felt they had something in common, felt that their opinions were sought after and valued by ABC staff and Federal MPs, and they had come to understand Heywire as unique, prestigious, and a rare opportunity for 'getting your voices heard'. Almost all the Heywire winners interviewed valued the Summit as highly worthwhile, an 'amazing' opportunity for 'voice', and they felt the experience boosted their self-confidence. Additionally, some participants valued that Heywire is "rural based", and hence a project and website that is exclusively for them.

While one of the Heywire project's objectives is to support youth to "make a difference" and improve life for youth who live in rural and regional parts of Australia, only two interviewees identified this as a motive for entering the competition. This is one way in which the objectives of the participants and the broader aims of Heywire project differed: while young people valued having a platform for sharing life narratives, the overarching objectives of the Heywire project requires their personal stories to speak to public narratives and draw attention to issues that affect the lives of non-metropolitan young Australians more broadly. A burden of representation, discussed in chapter three, is produced through the Summit's requirement that participants' stories "speak on behalf" of others (Mercer 1990, 65), and fulfil functions beyond the storyteller's personal intentions. It seems that some participants valued the ways their personal experiences reflected those of others, since they noted and enjoyed the sense of intimacy and shared worldviews fostered at the Summit. However, in creating an intimate public and encouraging rural and regional

youth to experience a sense of belonging together, it is possible Heywire strengthens a feeling of division or difference between this cohort and their urban, “city-slicker” counterparts.

Amongst the tensions foregrounded in the interviews was the uncertainty young people had about Heywire’s purpose and outcomes, revealing a lack of transparency in how the project is advertised and described to its potential participants. Few interviewees had a clear concept of what Heywire was beyond a platform for entering stories into a competition, and most were unaware of what the competition prize was, or of what else they might gain from sharing stories on the website. When the winners learned that their prize was a trip to Canberra and attendance at the Summit, they were vague about what this event would involve. This uncertainty was almost universal amongst the interviewees. Since so many were unclear about what their participation in Heywire would involve, it is perhaps unsurprising that five of the eight interviewees reported adult encouragement as a key reason they had entered the competition. While they were unsure of ‘what is Heywire?’ and how they might benefit from sharing stories on the website, they nevertheless participated because their teachers, parents, grandparents, and adult friends had encouraged them to do so.

The degree of involvement adults had in facilitating and shaping young people’s participation raises questions about to extent to which storytelling on the Heywire website can be understood as representative of youth autonomy and individual self-expression and self-representation. Evidently, the platform, its particular affordances and conventions, along with the involvement of school teachers, university tutors and family members mediate the self-representations of participants (Thumim 2012, 55). Processes of institutional mediation (ibid 58) factored significantly and numerous since, in addition to the ABC’s invitation to share narratives, schools and universities were other institutions who were at some point involved in facilitating young people’s participation, and whose agendas shaped the ways youth expressed themselves and represented their lives in this project.

The nature of young people’s self-representation on the Heywire website will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, in which the particular affordances of narrative for self-representation and identity construction will be described. While this chapter has been based on interview data and discussed the experiences of competition winners, their Heywire stories are the focus of chapter five. This cohort is not the only

group of interest in this thesis, though, and non-winning Heywire narratives are also analysed.

Chapter 5: The Stories

The nature of rural and regional young people's participation in the Heywire project is centred around the creation and sharing of life narratives. Unlike other forms of mediated participation, Heywire represents a space in which self-representation and voice are narratively constructed and expressed. By examining the types of life narratives Heywire participants share on the website, it is possible to explore the ways in which Heywire enables a specific kind of identity construction and self-expression, and the purpose this serves for the storyteller. Through inviting youth to share life stories, and through its explicit focus on rural and regional experiences, Heywire represents an environment that enables its participants to define and represent themselves in relation to their own societies and participate in the creation of meanings that affect their lives.

This chapter explores the last part of the research question: in what ways do participants repurpose the PSM-managed platform in unexpected ways, to produce various outcomes for themselves as well as the institution? While the previous chapter was based on interview data and discussed Heywire winners' own accounts of their participation, this chapter uses textual analysis to examine a variety of Heywire narratives, including those of winners and non-winners. Such a methodology enables an examination of these stories within the context in which they emerge, and it highlights their distinct nature as processes of meaning-making and identity construction and expression. The analysis of Heywire stories illuminates some of the complexities of enabling and sustaining "content-related participation" (Carpentier 2009, 2003). In Heywire, storytelling occurs as a negotiated process (Thornham and McFarlane 2014, 197) and these narratives must be understood as the outcomes of negotiations and interactions between the participants and the project. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Heywire stories emerge at the intersection of some diverse agendas. Processes of creating and sharing life narratives within this project are both enabled and limited by the precise affordances of the Heywire platform, along with the agendas of various institutions, and the personal aims of all individuals who are involved in the project. However, an analysis of Heywire stories also reveals that in spite of the myriad ways young people's participation in Heywire is shaped, both enabled and constrained by the affordances of the platform, participants can find their own meanings and fulfil their own authorial intentions within this space.

Examining the types of narratives rural and regional youth share on the Heywire website reveals tensions within the project in ways that are different from those outlined in previous chapters. Heywire stories demonstrate a coming together of participants' personal intentions for their stories, and the overarching objectives and affordances of the Heywire project. This chapter discusses how, at times, these tensions are problematic and potentially destructive. For instance, the broader objectives of Heywire at times clash with the ways young people want to tell self-representational stories. At other times, however, the outcome of these intersecting agendas illuminates some of the possibilities of Heywire. For example, the potential value of the project becomes clear when young people use Heywire to create and express an identity that is unique from those articulated in other mediated spaces, and that has a purpose and meaningfulness for the storyteller. Such cases are examples of productive tensions within the project since they reveal its useful possibilities, while also drawing attention to its shortcomings in realising them.

Despite inevitable challenges associated with managing and sustaining user created content in a project such as Heywire, and the complex intersecting of multiple, diverse, and at times contradictory agendas, Heywire is a singular space precisely because it invites young people to represent themselves through narrative. The youth interviews discussed in the previous chapter demonstrated that, in the minds of its users, Heywire represented a space for "gaining a voice that matters" (Macnamara 2013, 166), and for presenting to others the nature of their lives, their concerns, and the aspects of their rural and regional lifestyles that they enjoyed. These accounts, along with chapter two's demonstration of the ways in which the Heywire website differs from other online, or mediated platforms that young people frequently use for self-representation, self-expression, socialisation and content creation, reveal that young people can use Heywire to their own benefit, and to fulfil personal agendas. As Beth said in our interview, "on Heywire you're telling a story because you want people to know about something ... you're just being yourself and that's the best part about it, you know, where you're just telling a story that's close to you" (interview, December 2013). This chapter will expand on the ways in which rural and regional young people's participation on a narrative platform such as Heywire differs from their use of other mediated platforms by analysing Heywire stories as sites of identity construction and voice. By bringing narrative theories to bear on Heywire, and through textual analysis of young people's stories, this chapter theorises what the value of opportunities for narrative are and the degree to which these may be realised in Heywire.

Although the ABC's primary intention for the Heywire website is to enable youth to enter the competition, theories that posit narrative as a central feature of communication, meaning-making, identity construction and self-representation highlight the potential for a storytelling platform such as this to have a wider purpose and value in young people's lives. As a project and platform that invites the creation and sharing of life narratives, Heywire has the capacity to support its users to engage in processes of sense-making, self-creation, and self-representation. As this chapter continues to demonstrate, the multiplicity of intentions and actions that coincide within Heywire mean that some of these rich opportunities for self-representation are missed.

Narrative and identity

Drawing on theories of narrative and identity, in particular, philosopher Paul Ricoeur's (1980, 1992) concept of "narrative identity", this chapter considers the value of narrative in processes of meaning-making and identity construction. Performing a textual analysis on a number of Heywire stories offers a means through which to explore the ways in which young people make sense of their lives and identities, and the use of narrative as the tool through which meaning is constructed and articulated. Considered as 'texts', Heywire stories are representations of individual realities, offering insights into how the authors make sense of who they are and of their place in the world (McKee 2003, 1). Alan McKee explains textual analysis as "a methodology for gaining information about sense-making practices, that is, how members of various cultures interpret the world around them. We analyse texts ... treating them like clues (or 'traces') of how people have made sense of the world" (ibid, 63). The appropriateness of such an approach for an analysis of Heywire stories rests in the fact that narrative is explicitly a sense-making practice (Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 10; Somers and Gibson 1994, 58-59; Davis 2002, 12).

The purpose of Heywire, and hence of Heywire stories, is to enable young people to represent their own lives, experiences, concerns, "to be the authors of their own identities" (Heywire 2011), and to express these in their own voices. The platform's precise affordances thus centre on meaning-making, identity-making practices, making a textual analysis approach well suited to exploring the nature of these meanings and how they are constituted.

According to Harter, Japp and Beck, “we narratively construct and understand what we call our lives, creating ourselves in the process and shaping our existence in particular ways. We rely on narrative to engage in sense-making ... and to figure out how to be in the world” (Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 10). Understood this way, narratives, such as those young people construct and share through Heywire, are not only processes of relating or recounting experience; in addition to being communicative processes of ‘life telling’, narratives are also “life making” (Bruner 2004, 692). Heywire storytellers can be seen to be defining their self-concepts, evaluating their lives, their place within their societies and hence crafting a sense of one’s life and self that has a stability and authenticity for the storyteller. In the social sciences, health studies and cultural studies, narrative represents the singular most human way through which individuals organise and confer meaning on their experiences (Richardson 1990, 118; Ricoeur 1980, 178; Harter, Japp and Beck 2008, 3). For these disciplines, the study of life narrative is one way in which social life, human action, and the ways people create meaning and craft identities can be illuminated.

Heywire stories reveal experiences, identities and ways of understanding the world that are not enabled by or visible in other types of media. An analysis of these narratives provides insights into the lives of young, rural and regional Australians as understood by the storytellers themselves. As Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey argue, “narratives have the capacity to reveal truths about the social world that are flattened or silenced by an insistence on more traditional methods of social science” (1995, 199). As evidenced through digital storytelling initiatives and in Heywire, narratives can provide insight into societies, cultures, and ways of being that have traditionally been unseen, or misrepresented and misunderstood, and in a way that acknowledges and preserves the individual voice. In Heywire, the diverse lives of young people who live in Australia’s rural towns, on isolated properties and in regional centres are illuminated. These stories disrupt any homogenous idea of regional life or youth identities and unsettle or subvert authoritative or official constructions of what it means to live or be regional and rural. For Ewick and Silbey, narratives allow the silenced to speak and so provide openings in which distorting or over-simplified truths and representations of lives can be rewritten (1995, 199). Reading, watching and listening to Heywire stories reflects this potential: they open up the richness of social life and implore us to recognise the very localness of individual lives.

The multitude of life storytelling and digital storytelling projects that have been initiated worldwide, such as those referred to in chapter two of this thesis, are testament to

the usefulness of narrative as a tool for facilitating communication and participation, and for expanding people's capacity for voice and self-representation. Through applying narrative theories to Heywire, the precise affordances of storytelling for identity construction and expression can be explored. By inviting rural and regional young people to use various media to create and share self-representational narratives on the project's website, Heywire can provide both an occasion and space for this cohort to reflect on and make sense of their experiences, and, in the process, craft and represent their identities thoughtfully and purposefully.

Mediated identities

There is abundant scholarship that discusses the affordances of new, digital technologies for young people's identity construction, and new platforms for self-representation and identity performance (for example Buckingham 2008; Ito et al. 2010; Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013). For some researchers, online expressions of identity correlate entirely with embodied identities. Gray, for example, writes "I theorize the relationship between media and identities as sociotechnical, never imagining that social identities happen through unmediated processes" (2009, 16-17). For Gray, media do not produce *new* identities, but they are involved in the negotiation, articulation and representation of any identity (Gray 2009, 16-17). This approach usefully highlights two points that are in general true of young people's daily interactions with new media: firstly, new media such as social network sites are a taken-for-granted part of young people's lives and this cohort use them to gather with friends, negotiate and express identities, and generally do what they have always been doing (boyd in Ito et al. 2010, 84-85). Secondly, although the possibility is there, people do not tend to use new media to create entirely new, false or dishonest identities (Baym 2010, 115). These points posit new media as tools and spaces that augment non-mediated activities and processes of identity creation and expression, rather than tools or environments that people will use to produce identities that are radically new or different¹⁶.

¹⁶ There are of course exceptions to this rule. In online gaming environments, for instance, people do create new gaming identities that have no correlation to their 'offline self' at all.

Contrary to Gray's claim that, for young people, social identities do not happen through unmediated processes (2009, 17), I argue that the sorts of identities youth create for a platform such as Heywire cannot happen without the invitation and opportunity that Heywire provides. While the identities youth create on the Heywire website are likely to resemble the expressions of identity they articulate in other environments – either online or offline – Heywire identities are specific, situated, *narrative* constructions. While researchers such as Gray aim to “de-center media as the object of analysis” (Gray 2009, 16), this research relies on acknowledging that the media in question invites a particular style of participation and identity construction.

Life storytelling projects such as Heywire are explicitly spaces for “narrative identity” (Ricoeur 1980, 1992). That is, an identity that is created from and specific to the story told. Ricoeur (1992) develops this concept by establishing a fundamental link between experiences, storytelling and identity. Borrowing from narrative theory and referring to fictional devices, Ricoeur positions individuals as characters within their own life stories (Ricoeur 1992, 141). As characters, people give shape and meaning to their experiences and produce their individual (as opposed to social) identities in connection with them. This, he specifies, is narrative identity. It is an identity connected wholly to the particular events featured within the story told.

The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her “experiences.” Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character (Ricoeur 1992, 147-148).

From this perspective, the narrative establishes an identity that is specific only to the configuration of experiences expressed in a particular story. Since the individual's, or as Ricoeur writes, “the character's” identity correlates only to the identity of the story, different stories will produce different identities.

One of the defining characteristics of Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity is the way it bridges two opposing ways of understanding personal identity: the idea that identity is a fixed, unchanging core of self, and the notion that identity is malleable, fluid, open to change and reversioning. Ricoeur frames narrative as a tool for organising experience (Ricoeur 1980, 178) – an active process through which people “create a logical and coherent sense of self through an evolving and fluid encounter with the world” (Leyshon and Bull 2011, 163). Yet, by specifying that one's identity is only connected to the particular

story in which it was created, he reveals narrative identity as a dynamic, mobile form of identity which is open to change and “imaginative variations” (Ricoeur 1992, 150). Narrative identities must therefore be understood as possible interpretations of self which are by no means only, and as versions of identity which are infinitely variable.

Such ideas are well-suited to an analysis of storytelling and identity construction within Heywire. Mediated environments amplify the constructedness of identities and reflect the idea that these are *partially* permanent entities. While online environments preserve identity constructions and allow these to be viewed by the self and others, the architecture of the internet means they can also be revised, added to, subtracted from, and entirely reconstructed. As Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell argue, young people’s identities online are “an ongoing process, one that is always under construction but that also has a permanence or longevity” (Weber and Mitchell 2008, 43). As partially permanent constructions, mediated identities offer a unique way of experiencing the self (Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013, 75-77). The fleeting actions, thoughts and gestures that constitute identity in a non-mediated world are on the internet transformed into “something permanent, searchable and indexed” (ibid, 77). Individuals thus become highly visible to themselves, and more conscious of the way they are being seen by others. In this way, new media inevitably evoke a magnified degree of self-reflexivity (Filiciak, Danielewicz and Halawa 2013, 81; Weber and Mitchell 2008, 41) – a feature that illustrates how new media may be seen as encompassing particularly interesting and valuable affordances for young people.

Heywire combines affordances unique to mediated identity construction with the added value of storytelling. The deliberateness of narrative identity, combined with the storyteller’s heightened awareness of being visible to others online, are evidenced in Heywire stories. Through interviews with rural and regional youth who have used the Heywire website, through observations of the website and analysis of stories shared, it becomes clear that their narratives and the identities produced through these are not random, accidental or impulsive; rather, they are carefully constructed, deliberate self-representations. The thoughtfulness and purposefulness of these identities suggests that, for many young people, sharing a narrative on the Heywire website requires (or results in) some introspection and self-reflexivity as they consider their possible audience and how they want to be perceived by others. The act of creating and sharing narratives about one’s life requires young people to think about which aspects of their identities, and which of their memories, anecdotes and opinions are suitable to represent within this project.

Heywire stories: three categories

Analysing Heywire stories produces an interpretation of the storyteller's intention for their narrative, and hence of the ways in which these individuals confer meaning on their lives, understand, and represent their identities. The Heywire website is host to thousands of stories of varying styles and subject matter, created and shared through media including text, audio, photographs, video, and combinations of these. The website organises contributors' stories in several different ways: by date of submission; by media; and by topic or subject matter. Popular topics include: access to services, agriculture, health, housing, isolation, LGBT, immigration and leaving home (Heywire 2014b). These topics, and this style of organising and categorising Heywire stories, is likely useful for visitors to the website since it enables them to find narratives that address a subject of interest; however, it is less useful for representing the storyteller's personal intentions for their narratives.

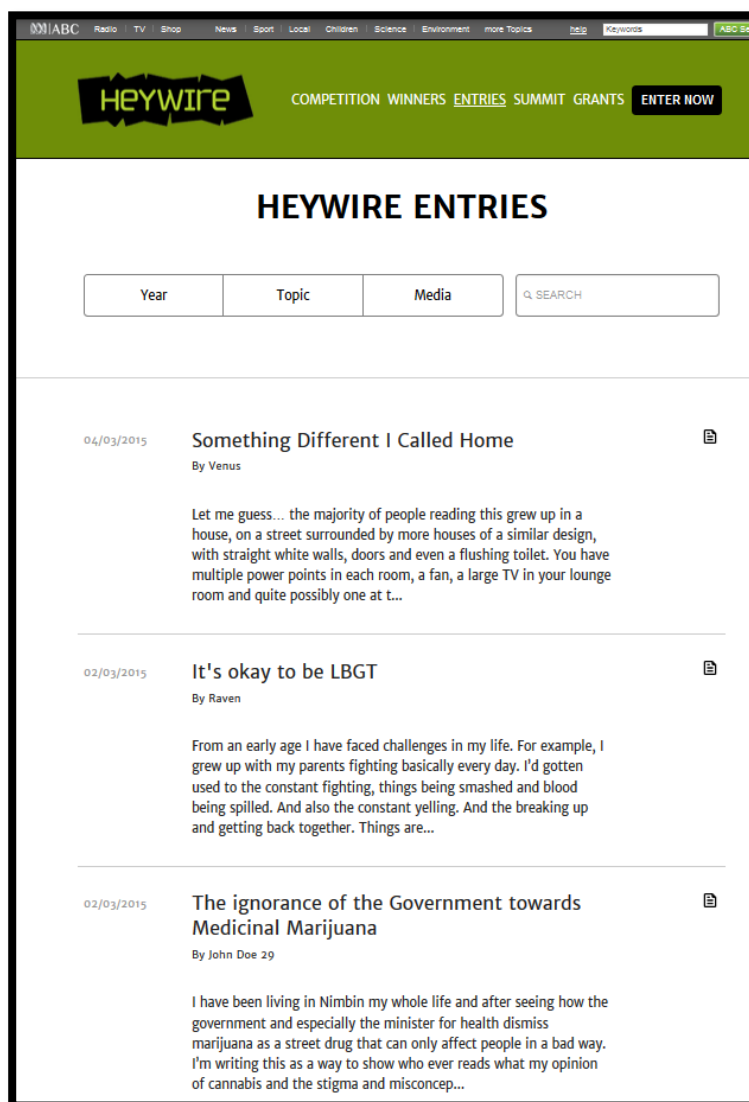


Figure 13: Example of Heywire stories as they appear on the website.

As described elsewhere in this thesis, Heywire stories and the ABC's aspirations for the project reflect some overarching trends and patterns in workshop based digital storytelling. For example, the three major themes that McWilliam (in Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 53) identifies for framing community-based digital storytelling practice are reflected in the objectives upon which Heywire was founded, and are in part representative of producers' visions for the sort of storytelling the project will facilitate. In particular, two of the themes that McWilliam describes – aspirational (in which marginalised storytellers are empowered through the process of storytelling) and recuperative (helping storytellers overcome adversity) (Hartley and McWilliam 2009, 53) – reflect the hopes that Heywire would empower rural and regional youth by providing them with an opportunity to express their views and have them recognised (McKenzie and James 2003, 9, 50). Both of these themes are evident in some Heywire narratives, such as those in which the participant depicts rural and regional issues, or youth concerns, or suggests ways in which life in “the bush” or “outback” can be improved for young people. While McWilliam's themes might help describe some of the foundational objectives of Heywire and usefully identify broad patterns in the content of young people's narratives, they do not adequately reflect the variety of tones and styles of Heywire narratives, nor help decipher the storyteller's intentions for sharing them. As a result, it is more useful to develop a number of new themes that more accurately encompass the types of stories that young people share via Heywire.

In order to highlight variations in the tones and styles of Heywire narratives, and to endeavour to understand the storyteller's intentions for sharing them, I group young people's stories under the following broad categories: educative (in which the storyteller intends to inform their audience of an issue, or a fact of their life); celebratory (where the story appears a celebration of an aspect of life); and confessional (where the story shared may have been difficult to tell and the telling may have enabled the storyteller to come to terms with an experience). These categories are not mutually exclusive and many stories represent an intersection of these themes.

Celebratory, educative and confessional narratives

Traditionally, a cultural studies approach to textual analysis would not be interested in the formal or aesthetic features of the texts in question (Saukko 2003, 99); however, the ways rural and regional youth have used various literary conventions, their use of language, and

the aesthetics of their stories are of interest here insofar as they provide insight into the sense-making processes of their creator. The methodology employed does not endeavour to determine the accuracy or ‘truth’ of Heywire stories, nor judge the degree to which they are ‘good’ or high-quality examples of life narrative; rather, it seeks to understand practices of meaning making and forms of representation, “the ways in which these forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal” (McKee 2003, 17). Importantly, narratives embody and reveal truths about the social world in which they are created. As Ewick and Silbey observe, “[n]arratives are not just stories told within social contexts; rather, narratives are social practices, part of the constitution of their own context” (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 211).

The texts analysed below reveal a diversity of ways in which Heywire storytellers claim identities as ‘rural’ or ‘regional’. Storytellers at times construct a personal identity through locating themselves within a collective. For others, identity is constituted through shunning or critiquing society, representing an instance where the storyteller has used Heywire to express a “dissident voice” (Davis 2002, 25) which may not have otherwise been articulated. In the Heywire project, ‘voice’ is an affordance of authoring a narrative identity.

Identity and belonging

For some participants, Heywire has facilitated the construction of a personal identity that is firmly linked to the identity of a collective, thus functioning as a means through which its creator can assert his or her belonging. Kayla, a Heywire participant I introduced in the previous chapter, created a story that is educative and celebratory (see figure 13). Kayla’s purpose for participating in Heywire – her desire to show others “how brilliant” life in western Queensland is (interview, February 2013) – also emerges clearly in her story. As she writes in her winning narrative, “out here, the opportunities are yours; they are endless. Isolation does not limit us”.

With an authorial aim to celebrate life in the outback and compare it favourably with city life and city people, Kayla constructs her identity in terms of comfort and belonging in the landscape she calls home, and also in opposition to others. Her word choices and imagery depict cities as lonely and those who live in them as aloof people she cannot identify with. She writes that in Brisbane, “surrounded by busy people, swiftly moving to catch their next engagement, I’ve never felt so horribly alone”. Furthermore,

visitors to the outback are portrayed as non-belonging; they are alienated by and ill-equipped to survive in the outback environment that Kayla represents herself as her home. She writes: “Tourists barge through in their airconditioned four wheel drives, piled to the roof and beyond with every gadget to survive in the Outback. They look from behind their tinted-windows. What’s a young girl like you doing out here?” Such a description holds an air of disdain. Through this tone, along with the suggestion that tourists will struggle to survive in the outback, Kayla creates what Hartley describes as ‘wedom’ and ‘theydom’ (in McKee 2003, 43); she claims an identity by differentiating herself from others, and aligning herself with a group in which she can belong.

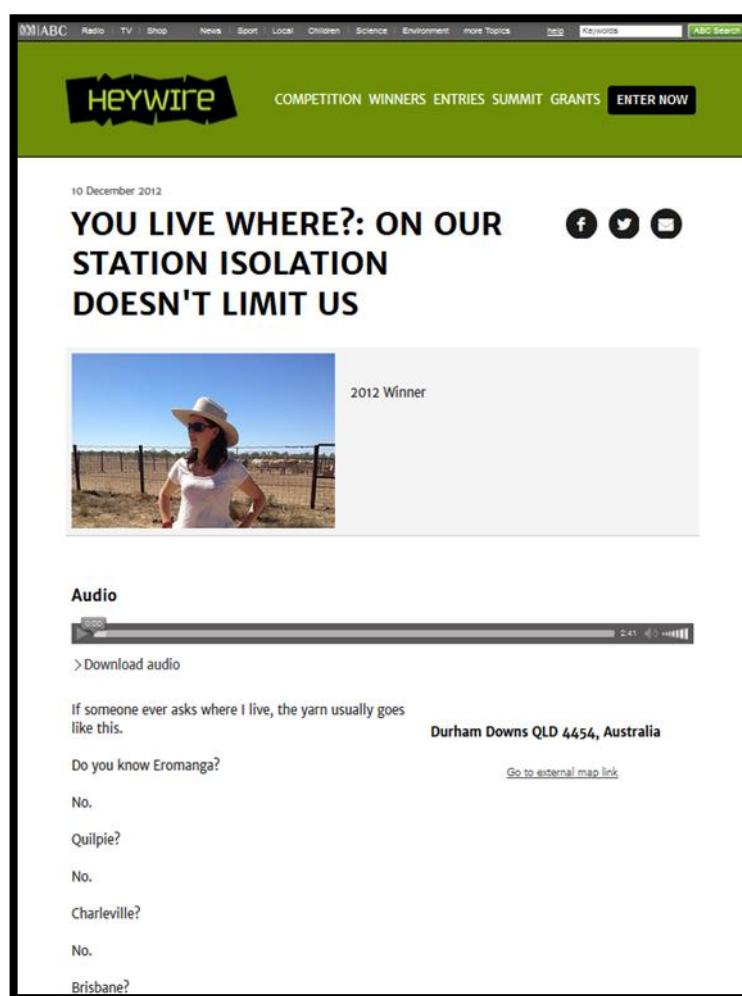


Figure 14: Kayla’s professionally produced Heywire story.

The story’s explicitly celebratory nature means it is well-suited to the Heywire competition. Kayla clearly, purposefully, draws attention to the joys and benefits of rural, or “Outback” living, highlighting its virtues through comparing it with “the city”. In doing so, she answers some of the prompting questions Heywire offers as *Tips for a great entry*:

“What are you passionate about? ... Why do you like living where you do?” (Heywire 2014a). Kayla depicts “the Outback” as a place of opportunity, and as a group of people with whom she is at home:

A bunch of people that are willing to embrace you for exactly what you are. Generous, honest people. No bull out here. There is no hierarchy, just lessons to be learnt in getting along with people from all walks of life. I chat at the campdraft with the local doctor, who is sitting alongside the ringers and the council workers. What you do for a quid is put aside; if you're up for a laugh it's all in.

It is part of Heywire's function to facilitate the sense of exceptionalism that emerges in Kayla's narrative and in the words and stories of other participants. By singling out the experiences and stories of regional youth, the project naturally encourages a tone of pride or superiority, and self-representational stories that construct regional lives as distinctive or unique.

As a platform that explicitly invites participation by rural and regional young people, Heywire supported Kayla's claiming an identity as part of this group. According to Joseph Davis, narrative can strengthen a collective identity: “Interpretative communities come together around stories, constituting and reaffirming themselves as groups with particular attributes” (Davis 2002, 19). From this perspective, the Heywire project can be seen to be offering a means of identification, an identity category that its participants can align themselves with, a positive outcome of which is supporting rural and regional young people to establish feelings of belonging (McKee 2003, 43). For Kayla, creating and sharing a Heywire story has been a process of making sense of herself in relation to others, and of fashioning and asserting an identity as part of a collective, a rural community, at home in “the Outback”, as ‘rural’. Such an identity is not an accidental occurrence, but rather an active, deliberate creation that is formed through the storyteller's precise selection, evaluation and emplotment of her experiences (Davis 2002, 14).

What is offered in Heywire, along with life storytelling projects such as DUSTY, Finding a Voice, and others I have referred to within this thesis, is an opportunity to create and express one identity that serves a particular purpose, such as identification with others. Different life storytelling projects will naturally prompt their participants to select and configure certain experiences and events, to omit others, and hence support a different kind of narrative identity. Reflecting Ricoeur's notion that the identity of the story creates the identity of the character (Ricoeur 1992, 148), the nature of the project largely determines the narrative identity that the participant articulates.

ABC Open, for example, curates storytelling through projects based around a specific topic or theme, each of which naturally prompts a distinct kind of self-representation. One such project is 'Family Trait' which asks participants to "[s]hare a story about your family's distinctive trait. Has it defined your life? Is it a badge of honour or have you struggled to accept it?" (ABC 2015c). These questions encourage participants to define themselves in relation to ancestry, inheritance, even genetic make-up. If Kayla had participated in this project instead of Heywire, she may have authored her identity through the construct of family, revealing more about how she understands herself in relation to her parents, grandparents and siblings, instead of in connection with people with whom she currently experiences community. With its specific focus on rural and regional youth, Heywire encouraged Kayla's creation of a narrative that celebrates outback life; it invited her to align herself with certain others, and hence facilitated her construction of an explicitly 'rural' identity. Clearly, Kayla's participation in the ABC Open project would have compelled her to evaluate her experiences and her self in ways quite different from Heywire, resulting in quite a different story, and occasioning another version of narrative identity.

The ways in which projects such as Heywire and ABC Open's 'Family Trait' enable such specific kinds of identity construction can be viewed as limitations: it is clear that these projects and platforms have precise aims which shape, enable and limit the ways people participate and represent their lives. However, Kayla's participation in Heywire provides a different perspective by illuminating the possibility for the boundaries and specificity of such projects to have productive outcomes, such as the construction of a sense of belonging. The 'country versus city' or 'me and them' dichotomy is a dominant theme in her story, but one that has in this instance fulfilled a useful purpose by enabling Kayla to develop her self-concept in response to her current situation. Drawing from Michael Leyshon and Jacob Bull (2011), through her narrative Kayla can be seen to be crafting an identity that functions as a coherent and stable sense of self, despite an evolving experience of the world (Leyshon and Bull 2011, 163).

'Good' storytelling and oppositional narratives

Similar to workshop-based digital storytelling, the Heywire project privileges stories that follow certain conventions and include textual and generic features that are characteristic of 'good' storytelling (Poletti 2011, 78). Referring to the seven elements of digital

storytelling established by the Center for Digital Storytelling in California, Poletti observes that digital storytelling generally “coaxes” autobiographical stories that follow a narrative arc; have a protagonist whose needs, desires and intentions are clear to the audience; and provide a sense of closure that satisfies the viewer, rather than fail to resolve the issues they have raised (Poletti 2011, 77-78). Similarly, Worcester notes that “[d]igital stories are encouraged to be explicit and have closure, rather than open-ended statements” (Worcester 2012, 94). For Poletti, the style of “coaxed life narrative” produced through digital storytelling initiatives are a distinct genre of autobiographical story, governed by textual features and rules which “establish specific ‘expectations about the kinds of stories that will be told and will be intelligible to others’” (Poletti 2011, 77).

The Heywire project is governed by similar expectations. Furthermore, ‘good’ storytelling in Heywire is also reflected in the tone and content of the narrative. The project prefers narratives that have a tone of optimism, that represent rural lifestyles and rural people positively, or that are at least constructively critical. The storyteller’s self-representation should emerge as a confident, inspired young person, either comfortable in his or her regional community or motivated to change it for the better. However, observing the Heywire website reveals that many of the narratives youth contribute are confessional stories that address topics such as mental health, death, drought and various forms of hardship or struggle. As mentioned in chapter three, online producer Jonathan Atkins prefers “tough stories” such as these to still incorporate a tone of optimism or to end with a sense of hope (interview, November 2012). Stories that construct rural and regional living negatively, or that do not conclude with a clear message or hopeful tone, are those which I characterise as at odds with Heywire’s visions for effective storytelling, and ill-fitting with the project’s intentions. Claire’s story is one such example.

Like Kayla, Claire’s story is based on the country versus city dichotomy; however, in direct contrast from Kayla’s overtly celebratory depiction of rural life and communities, Claire’s story focuses on the limitations and drawbacks of living in a regional town (see figure 14). She describes her hometown of Merimbula as “dead”, a “silent trap”, “there’s nothing to do and nowhere to go”; it is a place of limited social, employment and education opportunities. “I need to get out of here,” she writes.

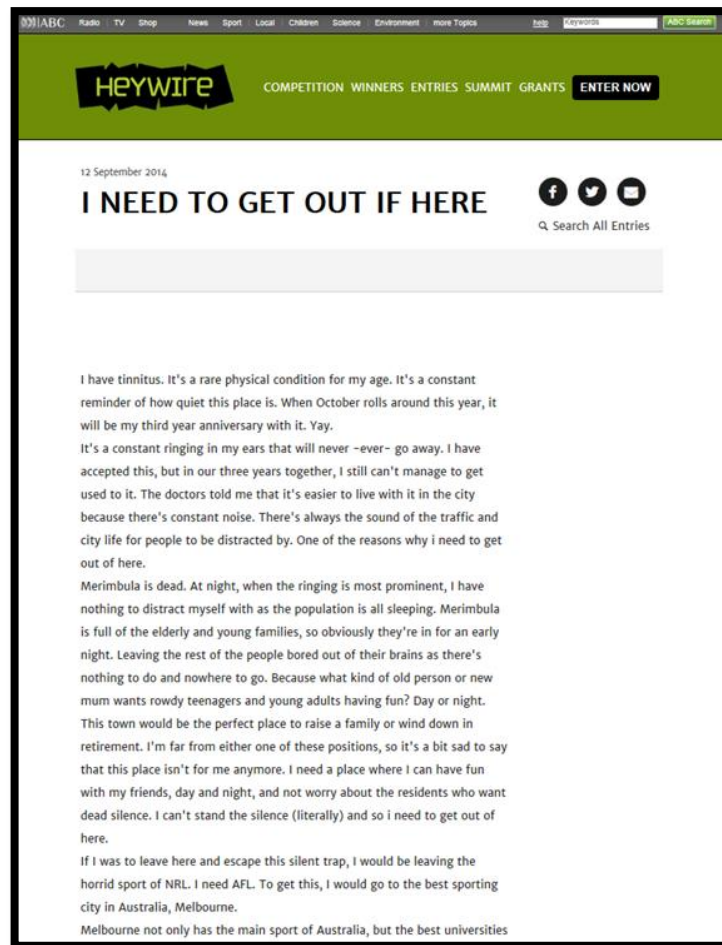


Figure 15: Claire's Heywire story (participant's version).

While Kayla depicted “the Outback” as brimming with potential, Claire’s narrative imparts a sense of being suffocated by the dreariness of small town life, and she clearly, deliberately disassociates herself from the rest of the Merimbula populace:

Merimbula is full of the elderly and young families, so obviously they're in for an early night. Leaving the rest of the people bored out of their brains as there's nothing to do and nowhere to go. Because what kind of old person or new mum wants rowdy teenagers and young adults having fun? Day or night. This town would be the perfect place to raise a family or wind down in retirement. I'm far from either one of these positions, so it's a bit sad to say that this place isn't for me anymore. I need a place where I can have fun with my friends, day and night, and not worry about the residents who want dead silence.

Claire defines her self purely by describing people who are unlike her, and in opposition to the identity categories in which she does not fit, such as young families and retirees.

Despite the differences in Kayla and Claire’s narratives, both these stories demonstrate the innately social, interpersonal nature of identity construction. Margaret

Somers proposes that “[i]f persons are socially constituted over time, space, and through relationality [that is, through relationships between other people, narratives, and institutions], then others are constitutive rather than external to identity” (Somers 1994, 629). Individuals orient themselves, come to understand themselves and construct their narrative identities within “a relational matrix” of culturally and institutionally embedded narratives, and in relation to institutions and to other people (Somers 1994, 626). Similarly, Davis argues that personal narratives are necessarily influenced and constrained by various types of pre-existing stories and “public narratives”, and that the stories we tell of ourselves are inherently social (Davis 2002, 20-21). It seems that, in creating their Heywire narratives, both Kayla and Claire considered their allegiance to the identity category ‘rural’ or ‘regional’. Their stories, and hence their self-constructions, are socially constituted, demonstrating that each storyteller’s self-understanding is dependent on other people, and on perceptions of what it means to live or be regional or rural.

For Kayla and Claire, the construction of narrative identity was clearly shaped, even enabled by, the people with whom they did and did not identify. The identification of others – in Kayla’s case, “tourists” and the people at the campdraft, and for Claire, “young families”, “the elderly” and “rowdy teenagers” – was a crucial part of the process of identifying the self. As can be seen in Kayla’s narrative, personal identity was created through a process of identification with others, and by locating herself within a collective. For Claire, identity was constituted through her disassociation with others, which led to a construction of self as an outsider.

Claire’s disassociation with others within her story represents a broader distancing from the ‘rural’ or ‘regional’ identity category that Heywire invites its participants to align themselves with. Her narrative is representative of a different sort of identity and voice. Towards the end of her story Claire writes that she needs to escape her hometown for Melbourne:

Melbourne has everything I need. The city noise and city life, the sport, the education, a job and an abundant amount of shops for me to waste all of my money. If I want to do what I want and be who I want to be, I need to get out of here and make my way down to Melbourne.

Stories that criticise features of rural life and demonstrate a preference for “the city” are not uncommon in Heywire; unsurprisingly, though, they are almost non-existent amongst the selection of narratives that win the annual competition, and they are significantly outnumbered by celebratory stories like Kayla’s.

Celebratory narratives consistently feature amongst each year's selection of winning Heywire entries, confirming that the project prefers and privileges stories with a positive tone, as opposed to stories like Claire's which depict rural and regional communities as places of entrapment, limitation and boredom. As Atkins describes, Heywire participants are encouraged to think beyond negative attitudes and perceptions of life in rural and regional Australia and to instead focus their stories on "what they're interested in and what they're passionate about" (interview, November 2012). In its failure to adhere to the preferred features of Heywire stories, and in its construction of an identity that opposes the positive, 'pleased to be rural' self-representation that is expected in Heywire, Claire's narrative defies the project's normal conventions for storytelling. Her story represents an "oppositional" narrative and a "dissident voice" (Davis 2002, 25).

Discussing the social organisation of narratives, Ewick and Silbey suggest that the particular context in which storytelling is elicited defines the kinds of narratives that are told, as well as their meanings and consequences (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 211). In the case of Heywire, the project's inviting life narratives that position their author firmly and comfortably within their non-metropolitan communities, and through its privileging of narratives that celebrate rural societies over those that criticise them, a particular understanding of rural and regional lifestyles, and of the identities of rural and regional youth, is produced. Taken together, the winning Heywire narratives that are broadcast on ABC Local Radio construct regional towns and rural lives as vibrant, wholesome, and community-oriented; the young people who tell such stories are resilient, insightful, and gratefully and proudly regional. These winning Heywire stories are of course "individual, seemingly unique, discrete personal narratives"; however, as detailed in previous chapters, they contribute to and reproduce these constructions because of the precise ways Heywire organises their expression (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 212). Stories such as Claire's, however, are "oppositional" because they disrupt such understandings by offering an alternative construction of what it means to be a 'regional youth' and to live in a regional town.

Oppositional narratives, or those which Ewick and Silbey (1995) describe as "subversive stories", can be understood as narratives that are at odds with or offer an alternative to dominant social narratives (Davis 2002, 25). For Ewick and Silbey they are "stories which defy and at times politically transform" (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 217). In the context of this research, oppositional stories are those which resist or redefine the rather homogenous constructions of rural life and of youth identities that are perpetuated through Heywire by offering a different insight into how rural and regional young people

might understand their societies. While the Heywire project supports its youth participants to assert their allegiance to ‘rural and regional’ – both as an identity category and as geographic locations – Claire represents a different way of participating through her rejection of the dominant representations of rural life and youth identities that this project enables. She claims a different identity for herself by demonstrating some ways in which rurality can be limiting and oppressive for young people, and some of the ways a lack of services can affect the daily lives of rural youth, such as the way they view society and experience their belonging. Despite the restrictive nature of Heywire and its clearly defined guidelines for storytelling, then, stories such as Claire’s reveal the possibility that participants can use the platform to their own ends, to express their views and represent their lives in ways of their own choosing, and in ways that are authentic to the storyteller. It is clear in this case that the personal intentions of the storyteller clashed with those of Heywire; yet, Claire’s use of Heywire indicates that conflicting intentions are not necessarily problematic.

Oppositional stories are not encouraged in Heywire and they do not tend to win the annual competition, but they are not disallowed or altogether excluded. Heywire shapes young people’s participation in numerous ways, and yet, as can be seen in the case of Claire, regional youth are not “utterly choreographed participants” (Papacharissi in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1452); rather, they are able to challenge the project’s own visions for what Heywire narratives ‘should’ sound like and do and use the platform to tell stories that fulfil their own intentions as authors. Although Heywire certainly privileges positive constructions of rural lives, young people such as Claire can be seen to be appropriating the platform’s ‘rules’ and making it meaningful in new ways.

These instances in which youth can be seen to be repurposing Heywire and articulating a dissident voice are significant; while Claire and other oppositional storytellers are unlikely to find Heywire useful in the ways intended by the ABC, they reimagine the affordances of the platform in order to suit their own purposes, and to endeavour to express their own voices. Since oppositional stories and dissident voices like Claire’s offer an alternative to the style of voice and identity construction that is invited by and preferred in Heywire, they provide a new “vantage from which the world can be seen or heard” (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 203). As expressions of narrative identity, the youth voices that emerge in a project such as this could not be articulated in the context of other mediated spaces for self-expression and self-representation. However ill-fitting narrative identities

and voices such as Claire's appear in the context of this project, they are identities that would not otherwise have a space for expression.

That Claire's voice is neither acknowledged nor privileged in the same way as the voices of competition winners is a limitation of the Heywire project. It is unlikely Claire experienced her participation in Heywire as meaningful. In contrast to the Heywire competition winners who reported that 'being heard' was an important outcome of their participation, non-winners such as Claire are unlikely to feel their voices are either recognised or valued through this project. As has been noted of other mediated spaces that facilitate 'voice', not everyone is guaranteed an audience who listens (Macnamara 2013, 166). Heywire's failure to facilitate listening and recognition for its large number of non-winning participants is problematic because it implies that some lives and experiences are unworthy of the attention granted others. Through its acknowledging of some voices and not others, Heywire risks exacerbating the sense of isolation and marginalisation that it originally intended to ameliorate.

In spite of Heywire's limitations in recognising stories such as Claire's and other narratives that diverge from its visions, the platform can potentially be useful to its participants in various ways. Opportunities for narrative occasion processes of meaning-making, self-understanding and identity construction that are not enabled through other forms of media participation. Davis suggests that through storytelling people "take an evaluative stance" towards the conditions of their societies (Davis 2002, 24), shaping their identities in relation to time, place, various institutions, other narratives and other people (Somers 1994, 626). Such is evident in the case of Claire who used storytelling via Heywire as a means to identify very precisely why "this place isn't for me anymore", to make sense of her self in relation to her society, and to claim an identity that distanced her from it. Such an identity construction is not the sort Heywire encourages or envisages, yet, through repurposing the platform to express a dissident voice, Claire was able to make Heywire useful in a new way. Ricoeur's theories suggest that the personal value Claire may have found in the process of storytelling is that her narrative clearly defines her present understanding of herself and her world, and provides a sense of directedness towards a preferable future (Ricoeur 1980, 174, 1992, 163).

Having a voice and affecting change

Narratives that seek to educate others about the nature of rural and regional life – either its joys or its tribulations – also feature prominently on the Heywire website, and are another favoured style in the Heywire competition. Tamara’s Heywire story, described briefly in the previous chapter, can be classified as an educative narrative (see figure 15). In describing the ways in which “the gas and mining boom” has altered life in her hometown, Tamara’s story can be read as importantly alerting others to the destructive effects mining has on individuals who live in regional communities. The Heywire project tends to facilitate this style of storytelling through its emphasis on young people “telling it like it is and making a difference”, and its invitation to youth to “have your say about issues that matter to you” (Heywire 2014d). Educating others about the personal difficulties she was facing as a result of coal mines near her home, as well as drawing attention to an issue with broader social ramifications appear to be Tamara’s intentions for her narrative. As she stated in our interview, she was unsure who would read her story but “I just wanted it to be heard”. The closing line of her story indicates she also wanted to instigate change. She writes:

I would like to see the big gas companies work more closely with the communities that they impact. More consultations should be held with the community, especially our young people, to identify what can be done to benefit the town.

Tamara’s desire to ‘be heard’ and her authorial intention to affect change is reflected in a significant number of other participants’ narratives. Indeed, the possibility that one’s opinions, experiences, concerns and ideas will be listened to is likely one of the main reasons young people choose to participate in Heywire. A number of youth interviewees reported their hope to “tell people”, “show others”, and “get heard”. One could surmise that intentions such as these would be almost universal amongst the young people who have shared their stories through Heywire. Rural and regional youth would not participate in the project if they thought no one would see, read, or hear their stories. As Crawford notes of social media platforms, the presence of listeners is necessary for provoking online self-disclosures (Crawford 2009, 529). In Heywire, the sense of having a voice is intrinsically linked to the idea of having an audience, and thus being heard. The sense that Heywire provides an audience is a motivation for storytelling and, for some participants, it is one of the unique and appealing affordances of this project.

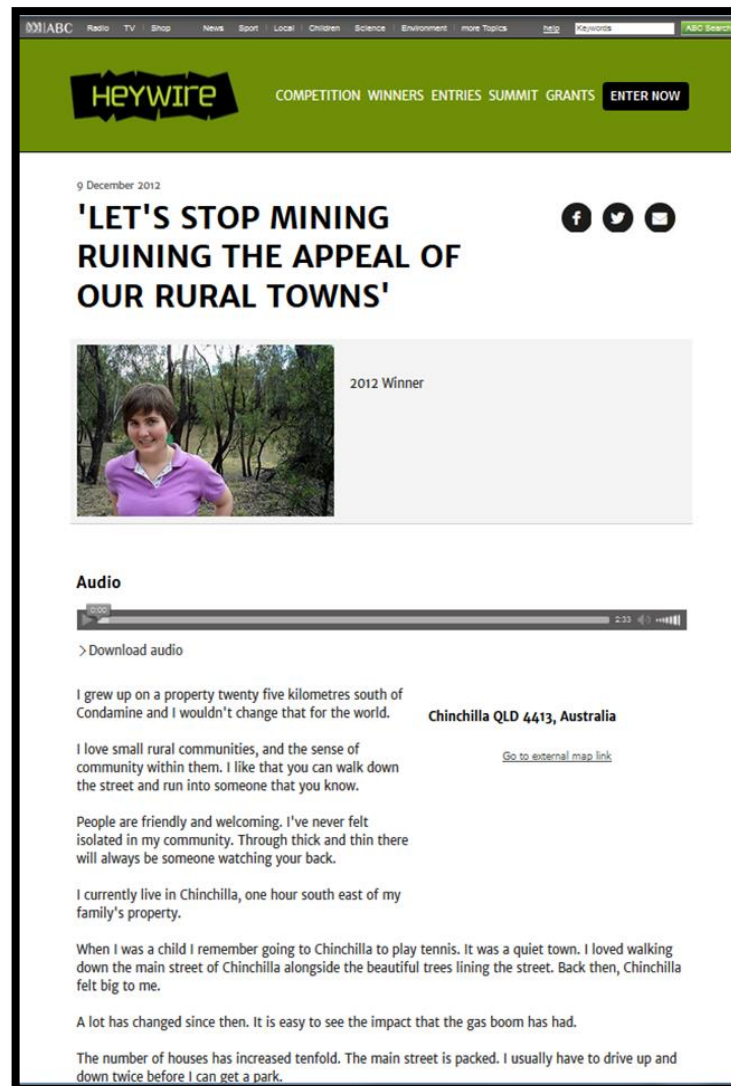


Figure 16: Tamara’s professionally produced Heywire story.

In Heywire, voice is an affordance of narrative identity: through telling stories and crafting their identities narratively, Heywire participants express not only their personal concerns and opinions, but also a way of knowing the self and their world, what can be called an experiential voice. This understanding of voice is echoed in Couldry (2010), who proposes understanding voice as both a process and a value: as a process, voice means “giving an account of one’s life and its conditions, what philosopher Judith Butler calls ‘giving an account of oneself’” (Couldry 2010, 7). While Couldry proposes voice as “giving an account” is a form of reflexive agency where one takes responsibility for one’s own stories (Couldry 2010, 8), for Heywire participants the act of having a voice is less an act of agency or control, but rather the meaning-making process that constitutes narrative identity, along with the request for this identity to receive recognition. Valuing voice, or as Couldry (2010)

states, for voice to “matter”, voice must be listened to (Tacchi 2012, 655; Macnamara 2013, 160).

‘Listening’ in this sense does not refer only to acknowledging another’s opinions or viewpoints, but as a process that values and legitimises one’s life and identity as valid, and “on a par” with others (Fraser 2001, 24). Nancy Fraser suggests this in her discussion of recognition as a matter of social justice and a means of redressing harm. She warns against models of recognition that “impose a single, drastically simplified group identity, which denies the complexity of people’s lives” (Fraser 2001, 24). Instead, she proposes that “what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction ... capable of participating on a par with one another in social life” (ibid). Through inviting young people to ‘give an account’ of their lives, Heywire enables the expression of an experiential voice and thus encompasses the possibilities of enabling the discrete, individual conditions of people’s lives to be heard and valued. Yet, the nature of the project means that listening and recognition are unevenly distributed.

Within this overarching framework for voice and listening, Heywire stories suggest some various understandings of what it means to ‘have a voice’ and ‘be heard’. Kayla, for instance, thought of voice as sharing her worldview, literally ‘showing’ others the joys of life in “the Outback” (interview, February 2013). The interview with Jack suggested the desire to voice an identity of his own making: “I just saw it [Heywire] as my opportunity to get heard and seen for who I am”, he said (interview, December 2013). For Tamara, voice and being heard refer to a capacity to affect change, reflecting Tacchi’s definition of voice as the opportunity to not only express one’s views, but to get results (Tacchi 2012, 655).

The ways in which narratives can be strategically, powerfully used in activist contexts and to achieve social and political change is demonstrated in digital storytelling projects such as *Finding a Voice* (Tacchi 2012, 2009), and in Davis’s *Stories of Change* (2002) which explores the role of storytelling in social movements. The articulation and sharing of personal narratives enables storytellers to demonstrate how issues such as injustice or oppression operate in their daily lives (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 221). In this way, as Davis argues, stories prompt listeners

to identify and empathize with real protagonists, to be repelled by antagonists, to enter into and feel morally involved in configurations of events that specify injustice and prefigure change... with their personal immediacy and symbolically evocative renderings of experience, stories can stimulate strong emotional responses in hearers—such as sympathy, which

can heighten common identity, and anger, which can spur or increase the motivation to work for change (Davis 2002, 24).

In *Finding a Voice*, digital stories raised awareness of important issues such as domestic violence. Personal narratives and locally-produced video content demonstrated how such issues were experienced on a local level, leading to discussions and debates which would not otherwise have happened (Tacchi 2012, 660). As Tacchi explains, “[t]he fact that the issue was raised through content created by local young women, in their own voice, made the issue easier to discuss, overcoming taboos, and opening up a space for sharing different viewpoints and opinions” (ibid). Tamara’s *Heywire* story encompasses a similar potential.

Coal mining and its effects on Australia’s regional towns and agricultural industries is a heavily contested topic, with news headlines either celebrating the creation of new jobs in non-metropolitan centres, or warning that coal and gas companies are destroying farming and cropping land “at an alarming rate” (see for example McOwan 2015). As a personal narrative, Tamara’s story provides insights into this issue that cannot be gleaned from journalists, and reveals truths that are “flattened or silenced” (Ewick and Silbey 1995, 199) in other representations of how mining companies affect rural and regional societies. By authoring an identity as almost victimised by the coal and gas companies and the people who work for them, Tamara demonstrates, in a very powerful way, how mining affects her life on a daily basis. One of the valuable aspects of *Heywire* is that it facilitates the emergence of stories such as these, and of lives, experiences and worldviews that are rarely represented in the mainstream media.

Rather than offering abstract descriptions of coal mining’s negative impacts on society or the environment, Tamara appeals to her audience and stimulates empathy through describing her memories of Chinchilla pre-mining boom, and through depicting the specific challenges she faces now. For example, in her story she describes the difficulty of finding a space to park her car on the town’s main street, and says it is almost impossible for her to find a rental she can afford. Further, “[w]hen I walk into the local pub after work it’s uncomfortable. It’s full of hordes of men drinking. I feel like a worm who’s surrounded by hungry crows”. Through metaphor, imagery, the characterisation of villains and victims, Tamara’s narrative makes a broad, political, social and environmental issue local, personal, and emotional. In doing so, it might raise awareness, stimulate emotional responses in its readers, and spur action and change (Davis 2002, 24).

Tamara's narrative represents an instance where the storyteller's own intentions for her story align with the broader aims of the Heywire project, and are thus effectively supported by it. Tamara's self-representation – as a victim wanting to fight back against her oppressors – is in effect enabled by Heywire in the project's inviting participants to describe things that matter to them, personal challenges, or issues that affect their communities (Heywire 2014c). The ways in which young people's participation is shaped, both guided and constrained by the nature of the platform is a source of tension within the Heywire project: while Heywire invites young people to share stories about their lives and discuss topics of their own choosing, the project requires these stories to fit within a specified framework and fulfil larger institutional agendas. Although such tensions can be problematic, Tamara's narrative demonstrates their potential to produce fruitful outcomes. Tamara's story, occasioned by Heywire and expressed under the auspices of this project, enabled her to author and voice an identity as an activist. While Tamara may not express an identity such as this through her day to day interactions with her friends, family, or co-workers, the Heywire project prompted her to identify and evaluate her position on an issue and voice her desire for change.

As Heywire stories reveal some different understandings of what it means to have a voice and 'be heard', these narratives also reveal rural and regional young people striving to affect change in various capacities. In 'Size isn't everything', for example, Bella seeks to challenge stereotypical representations of female beauty by describing her own struggles with body image (see figure 16). Her story, submitted to the Heywire website as an audio entry, is an educative narrative that also contains confessional and recuperative elements, evident in the way she represents herself as one who has overcome adversity in order to "fix the negative perception women of today have about themselves". Like other storytellers who tell stories to affect change, Bella evaluates and emplots her personal experiences in a way that diffuses certain values – in this instance, pertaining to beauty – and, through her narrative, she constructs new meanings and identities.

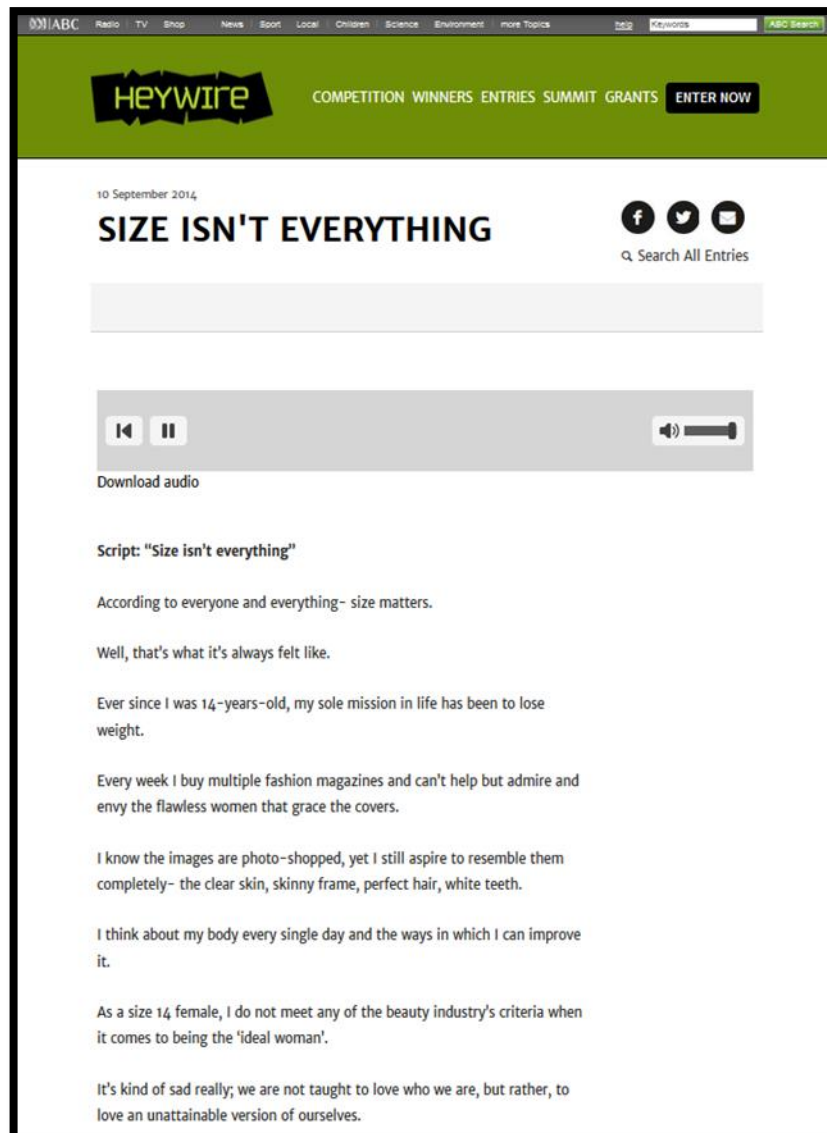


Figure 17: Bella's Heywire story (participant's version).

Bella's story purposefully critiques prevalent constructions of "the 'ideal woman'" and, through asserting her identity as a confident person "[b]earing no resemblance to a Victoria Street Model, with an unconventional runway body", she strives to make visible an alternative representation of beauty. Bella begins her story by depicting her vulnerability, demonstrating the ways perceptions of "the 'ideal woman'" perpetuated by fashion magazines and "the beauty industry" have shaped her own negative self-concept. In the second half of her narrative, she redefines this identity through describing the "life-changing" experience that taught her "[c]onfidence is the key to beauty, and being different is also beautiful". Similar to the process that occurred in Tamara's participation, Bella's narrative identity, crafted and expressed through Heywire, enabled her to voice and therefore validate a construction of beauty that challenges those typically delivered

through other media. Part of Heywire’s usefulness, then – both to its storytellers as well as to the broader Australian public – is that it enables the emergence of such representations, and thus opens up opportunities to oppose and rewrite meanings that are homogenising or damaging.

Both Tamara and Bella’s narratives reveal a way in which Heywire differs radically from other mediated platforms on which young people create and voice their identities. As a narrative platform that encourages young people to identify and describe personal challenges, express their opinions on social problems, and discuss things they are passionate about (Heywire 2014a), Heywire supports its participants to contribute their voices in meaning making processes that affect them. For example, through Heywire both Tamara and Bella authored identities in response to an issue of personal concern, which had benefits on several levels: firstly, the invitation to share a story prompted these storytellers to claim a position on a topic and contribute their voices to the construction of meaning – either by providing a different insight into an issue, as in the case of Tamara, or by challenging certain productions of meaning, and constructing new meanings, as in the case of Bella. As a platform for narrative identity, Heywire enabled these storytellers to interpret their own experiences address specific problems. According to Davis, “[t]hrough stories, participants are called to take an evaluative stance toward unjust social conditions” (Davis 2002, 24), and this can be seen to be happening in the cases of Tamara and Bella.

Challenges of co-creation and confessional narratives

While Tamara and Bella’s stories demonstrate occasions where the objectives of the Heywire project and the authorial intentions of its participants can intersect in ways that produce productive outcomes, other Heywire narratives reveal ways in which the combination of agendas at play in the project can collide less productively. For example, the ways Heywire facilitates and curates young people’s storytelling at times clash with the personal visions that participants have for their narratives. Two concepts are useful for investigating the difficulties of curating personal stories for broadcast: mediation and co-creation. While Heywire’s aim to facilitate young people’s self-representational storytelling and broadcast their voices occurs in the spirit of collaborative, co-creative media, such a process is not without challenges.

For Thumim (2012), all self-representations are mediated – that is, enabled by, limited, and shaped by, the institution that invited them, as well as the platform on which they are articulated. Using the example of the Capture Wales digital storytelling project, Thumim explains that the self-representation, in the form of the digital story,

comes about through workshop processes, conversations, technological affordances and limitations, institutional requirements and expectations, personal ideas about production and more beside. These are all examples of the processes of mediation shaping the self-representation which the woman in question ends up completing (Thumim 2012, 54).

Heywire stories are mediated through the lens of the ABC which frames them as “the voice of regional youth” and “regional youth telling it like it is and making a difference”. Thumim describes this as textual mediation which frames how the self-representation will be perceived by the audience (Thumim 2012, 61-62). When Heywire stories are seen on the website, via the Heywire Facebook page, or heard broadcast on ABC Local Radio, they are always clearly marked as the voices and opinions of youth. Such framing is important to the storytellers, to the ABC, and also to ABC Radio listeners since it provides context which makes these stories accessible to audiences, and helps them be received in a sympathetic way.

The idea of co-creation is somewhat related to mediation since it also acknowledges and seeks to investigate the ways in which a number of social, technological and institutional factors are implicated in and influential to the processes and outcomes of producing media content. According to Christina Spurgeon, the term “co-creative media” refers to a participatory media practice and a collaborative approach to media production, as exemplified by workshop-based digital storytelling (Spurgeon 2013). “In short, co-creative media provides a tool for describing the ways in which participatory media are facilitated by people and organizations, not just technology” (Spurgeon et al. 2009, 275). Spurgeon’s (2013) use of the term to refer specifically to a collaborative orientation to media production and a participatory media ‘art’ is clearly where the concepts of co-creation and mediation diverge. Mediation does not have to refer to participatory media or collaborative processes of content creation or media self-representation, whereas the idea of co-creative media that is most useful in the context of this research pertains specifically to participatory media practices, such as digital storytelling.

Aligning with Spurgeon et al.’s (2009) description of co-creation, in Heywire, young people’s storytelling and self-representation occurs in an institutional context, as part of a

facilitated project with explicit aims and clearly defined processes (Spurgeon et al. 2009, 276). Such a model differs from the more 'spontaneous', unfacilitated forms of participation and media production that occur on platforms such as YouTube (ibid). That Heywire stories are shaped by the requirements and intentions of the ABC is especially clear of the stories that are selected as winners of the annual competition. Winning Heywire stories are examples of co-creative media since professionally producing these narratives for broadcast involves collaboration between young people and ABC staff from either Heywire or ABC Open (Atkins, interview, November 2012).

The concept of co-creation is important not only for describing what the ABC does or aims to do, or the process of producing Heywire stories for broadcast; co-creation is an important idea for drawing attention to the value – or potential value – of such a process, and further differentiating these practices from other forms of user-created content. Describing ABC Open, Spurgeon argues that “building capacity for self-representation and media participation often requires expert facilitation. The will to generate content alone, is not always enough” (Spurgeon 2013, 14). What is meant here is that individuals often lack the capacity to create their own media content, and the presence and expertise of project facilitators is fundamental to how successfully these projects engage members of the community and facilitate their creative expression (ibid).

While Heywire stories are broadcast as the personal narratives, voices and viewpoints of young, rural and regional Australians, it appears they need to be enhanced in terms of audio and visual quality before they can be distributed across multiple ABC platforms. By co-creating winning Heywire stories, ABC staff members turn young people's short, episodic snapshots of everyday life into digital narratives with clear intentions or messages. Structural editing, audio recording, and curating visuals to accompany text based stories may make Heywire narratives more engaging and accessible, and therefore ensure that young people's voices can be easily and widely 'heard' by ABC audiences and in the Government departments that support the project. However, processes of co-creation and the ABC's editorial changes create some mixed feelings amongst Heywire participants. Most young people interviewed for this thesis indicated that they had no problems with the ABC's editing of their story and felt that this enhanced their story in a positive way. An example of a positive experience of co-creation can be found in Appendix 3. However, the reports of other interviewees highlighted complexities such as control and ownership, and the honouring of the storyteller's personal intentions.

Interviews with Heywire participants revealed that it is often ABC staff members, rather than the youth storytellers, who control both the process and outcome of producing Heywire stories for broadcast. Ollie, for example, a 2012 winner who shared a story about his local football club, the Redbacks, described that he and a number of other Heywire storytellers were simply handed edited scripts of their original stories and asked to read them while ABC staff recorded. According to Ollie:

I got to meet all the other regional finalists and they brought us all into the ABC studio in Bendigo and they just handed us the edited copy [of our stories] for radio and we just had like two reads over it and then we were straight into it, which was so much fun ... Johnno and Dan who were there, they were great to work with, and it's lots of fun, you know. Johnno who I worked with personally, he really wanted to have fun with it and, um, our local football club's mascot is the Redbacks so [when creating sound effects for the story] we're continually going "go Redbacks! Go Redbacks!" 'til we got one that felt that excitement or, not so much that excitement but that enthusiasm (interview, February 2013).

Ollie evidently enjoyed this experience and he was proud of his professionally produced story. "I'm really happy with how – I couldn't have done it better. If that was my actual submission I'd be really happy with it still", he says. The editing process that Ollie described highlights the complexity of co-creation since it depicts the fun of collaborative media production and the satisfaction of the storyteller, while also drawing attention to the limited degree of control Ollie had in the finalising of his personal narrative.

For some Heywire participants, having their stories edited by the ABC is a major intrusion on what they feel is a very personal story that belongs to them only and not the ABC. Some confessional narratives, such as Beth's (see figure 17), are clearly illustrative of the problems of co-creating personal stories. Confessional narratives are characterised by their intimacy and sense of personal disclosure. Further, in confessional stories, the storytellers' intentions appear less to convey meaning to others and more to make meaning within the self. For instance, while Kayla and Tamara's storytelling was clearly purposed to inform others and 'be heard', Beth's intentions for her story appear more insular than this.

Beth's story has an air of intimacy: she describes memories of her childhood spent with her cousins and grandparents in rural New South Wales, and the last few weeks of her grandmother's life, where Beth sat by her hospital bed singing to her as she died. Beth depicts her childhood memories vividly, describing the Christmas holidays with her cousins where they'd play music together, pick ripe mulberries, and lie by the local pool until they

were sunburned. Beth addresses her Grandma directly at various points throughout her story, enhancing the sense of intimacy:

Grandma, remember one of the last times my mother, sister and I came to visit you? You had your eyes closed and no matter how much Mum squeezed your hand and spoke your name you wouldn't stir. I began to sing for you and as soon as you recognised my voice, your eyes lifted and you lay in bed watching me.

The core themes in Beth's story – life, loss, love – are universal, and yet, there is a strong sense that Beth has opened a window into her private world, her life and memories. Unlike Kayla and Tamara, she does not write outwardly for others; her story is for her and her Grandma.

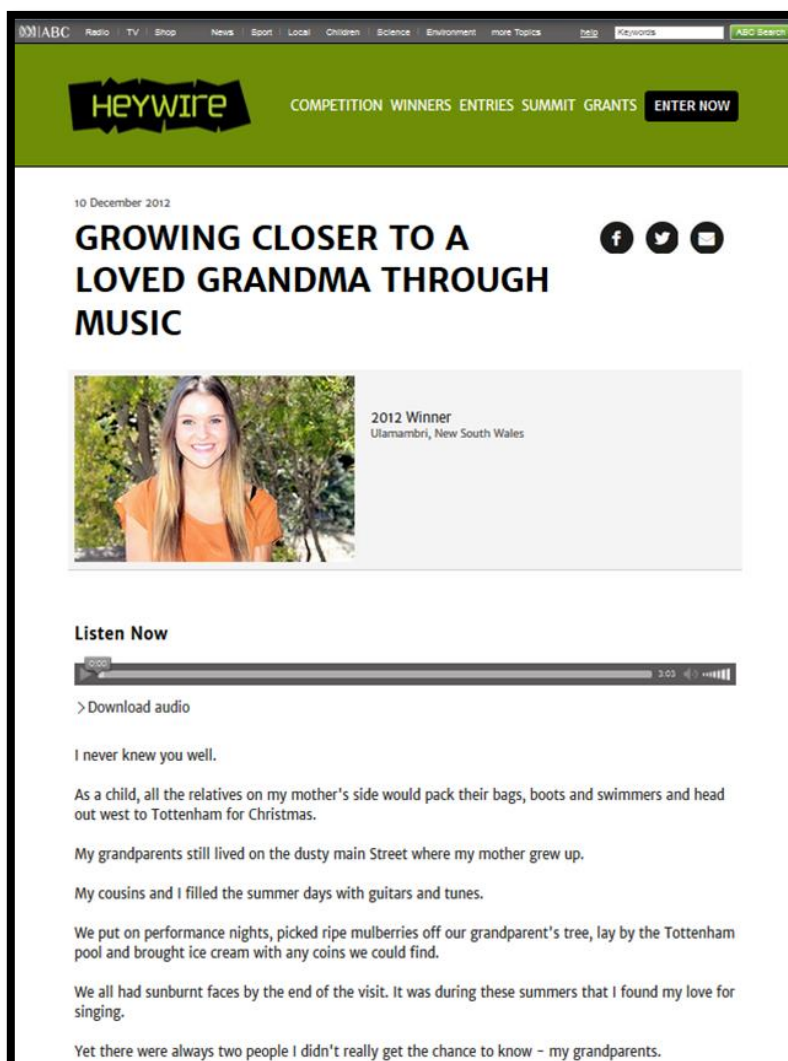


Figure 18: Beth's professionally produced Heywire story.

Beth valued that "Heywire finally made me tell my story" (interview, December 2013), yet the highly personal nature of her story, and her sense of ownership over it was a

point of friction associated with her participation. Beth felt that ABC staff had changed her story significantly, and this initially upset her – a reaction that indicates she felt her story was hers and not the ABC’s. She used the phrase “they had no right to do that to my story” (interview, December 2013). Beth’s original narrative was an audio piece in which she read her story aloud, and overlaid this with her singing and guitar playing¹⁷. She describes the most significant, obvious change between her original narrative and the ABC’s professionally produced version were changes to the music component. She says “they cut most of it out” without her knowledge, or her permission. Beth described that she had included this music because it was the song she had sung to her Grandma, thus suggesting she felt it was fundamental to her story, and of great personal significance to her as a storyteller.

While co-creation seems to promise a collaborative model of media production that can usefully facilitate self-representation and voice, Beth’s experiences reveal some of the ways in which processes of co-creation are problematic. The concept of co-creative media acknowledges that self-representations are facilitated, guided and shaped by media professionals and by the context and objectives of the project in which they are solicited; however, while most discussion of co-creative media practices such as digital storytelling have illustrated the value of such an approach (see for example Spurgeon et al. 2009; Spurgeon 2013), Beth’s experiences highlight some of its limitations and shortcomings. For instance, while co-creative processes can usefully engage people in digital media production, facilitate self-representation, and amplify the voices of excluded or marginalised people by enabling their stories to be widely shared (Spurgeon et al. 2009, 276-277), participants such as Beth call into question whether these processes are in fact ‘participatory’ – that is, to what extent do the participants have ownership and control over their stories and self-representations?

As can be seen in the case of Beth, the need for the project to meet explicit objectives and overarching institutional agendas can mean that the authorial intentions of its participants are undermined or overlooked. The fact Beth was not consulted about the changes to her story indicates that, for Heywire, it was more important that her story met a

¹⁷ Due to changes to the Heywire website in July 2014, Beth’s original audio narrative is no longer available for listening.

certain level of audio quality than the intentions of the storyteller were honoured. This case reveals a clash of intentions between the project and its participants: the way Beth wanted to tell her story conflicted with the editorial decisions of ABC staff members, who perhaps saw the need to alter her story to ensure it was accessible and engaging to ABC audiences. Tensions such as these are damaging in the sense they impact negatively on the participants' experience of the project, likely making them feel their intentions for their stories were not respected, and that they had limited control over their own self-representations.

The clash of intentions evidenced in Beth's story and her description of her experiences reveal broader problems in the way Heywire deals with confessional narratives. Confessional storytellers and young people who use Heywire to express an oppositional narrative or dissident voice make explicit the ways in which Heywire under-delivers on its promise to give voice. For example, the ways ABC staff shaped Beth's narrative to align with the requirements of Heywire reveals a failure to support the storyteller to express and amplify a voice of her own construction, and the voice that she intended to express. For other confessional storytellers and young people whose narratives are unsuited to the requirements of the competition, Heywire fails to listen.

For the most part, confessional narratives cannot contribute the positive, informative tone that generally emerges in Heywire. They do not spark an easy discussion or debate, nor do they fit the competition criteria and they are rarely selected as winning entries. While Heywire prefers narratives that have closure and "a little bit of hope at the end, or a message" (Atkins, interview, November 2012), confessional narratives often conclude with a tone of confusion, uncertainty or despair. For example, in 'Life and death', Lucy describes the pain she and her mother experienced during her father's illness and after his death (see figure 18). Unlike educative narratives such as Tamara's, Lucy's intentions for her story do not seem to be to affect social or political change or inform others; rather, her authorial objectives seem to be to connect, organise, reflect on and express memories and emotions. The story comprises fragments of memories and reflections which Lucy has pieced together to depict her feeling of denial, the ways she misses her father, and her perceptions of her mother's grief. Although Lucy's story is concise and more controlled, descriptive, and organised when compared with the fragmentary and often incoherent nature of some confessional narratives, the story's tragic subject matter and deeply insular nature distinguish it as confessional and render it unsuitable for the Heywire competition. Beth's winning Heywire story is also a confessional

narrative and depicted the death of a loved one, yet, unlike Beth, Lucy's narrative is devoid of any bright moments or happy memories. It does not speak explicitly to public narratives and is not the style of Heywire narrative that one would normally hear broadcast on ABC Radio.



Figure 19: Lucy's Heywire story (participant's version).

Similar to Beth and Jack, Lucy may have shared her story via Heywire because she perceived it to be a 'safe space' for self-expression. Perhaps, like Tamara, Heywire appealed to Lucy because it specifically invited her to share her experiences. It is possible that, through providing an invitation and platform for narrative, Heywire functions as a space that young people such as Lucy can use to make sense of difficult experiences and to negotiate their self-concepts in light of them. Sunwolf Frey and Keränen explain that "[s]tories offer a way of knowing and remembering experiences, and provide a powerful structure for binding together seemingly isolated or confusing events in a meaningful

way” (Sunwolf, Frey and Keränen 2008, 240). In a similar vein, Harter and Carabas argue that

Storytelling is pivotal in the process of sensemaking, allowing individuals to cope with chaotic, equivocal, and confusing conditions of everyday life, including illness and suffering ... the very voicing of an illness experience in story format is itself an act of agency and healing (Carabas and Harter 2008, 152).

Through offering young people a storytelling platform on which to share opinions, experiences and thoughts, Heywire appears to have the potential to be an opportunity and ‘safe space’ in which storytellers can come to terms with tragic events and make meaning of their memories. However, the possible benefits that may emerge through opportunities for narrative are limited if people’s stories are not acknowledged.

As has been argued throughout this thesis, voice must receive recognition in order for processes of self-expression to be meaningful to the speakers. Dreher suggests that ‘speaking up’ should be seen as a minimum requirement or productive starting point, rather than a sufficient goal or endpoint in struggles for change (Dreher 2012, 164, 2010, 97). Similarly, Sunwolf, Frey and Keränen (2008) argue that storytellers require “storylisteners” in order for their narratives to achieve personal benefits and meanings. A failure to listen to or recognise personal narratives not only deprives storytellers of the potential benefits of narrating, but also risks subordinating some lives and experiences and positioning certain voices as not worth hearing.

Such problems reflect Fraser’s (2001) discussion of the politics of recognition and the problematic of misrecognition, or the failure to recognise some individuals and groups. For Fraser, the injury of misrecognition occurs when institutions regulate interaction according to cultural norms that constitute some social actors as normative and others as inferior (2001, 24-25). She writes that misrecognition is social subordination since “the result is to deny some members of society the status of full partners in interaction, capable of participating on a par with the rest” (Fraser 2001, 25). By privileging some narratives and failing to recognise others, Heywire seems to foster the form of misrecognition that Fraser describes, and deny many of its storytellers the status of a “full partner” or equal participant whose voice and viewpoint is as worthy as others (Fraser 2001, 27). It seems that, as a competition, Heywire is structurally unsuited to facilitate listening or provide the recognition necessary for all participants to experience the value of narrative. The project’s primary mission is to acknowledge the lives and experiences of a minority group and

facilitate their self-representation; however, for subversive, oppositional and confessional storytellers, the project seems to amplify alienation and subordination rather than alleviate it. While the processes of narrating can usefully function as a tool for organising one's experiences (Ricoeur 1980, 178) and can instil in storytellers a sense that their lives are important and their stories are interesting (Burgess 2006, 211), an absence of listening and a failure to recognise confessional narratives such as Lucy's and subversive stories such as Claire's might only serve to intensify feelings of otherness or marginalisation.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined a number of Heywire stories in order to outline the possibilities and the shortcomings of the Heywire project as a platform for narrative, as opposed to the competition, or the Regional Youth Summit. It has explored the capacity for Heywire participants to fulfil their own authorial intentions, and how their participation is meaningful in some unexpected ways, and ways that are not always envisioned by the ABC. Heywire demonstrates how the coming together of multiple agendas can facilitate young people's creation of a narrative identity that leads to feelings of belonging, or that enables the storyteller to express her voice and affect change. At the same time, this project reveals some of the less productive tensions that emerge in processes of co-creation and the project's privileging of some stories, which constitutes others as comparatively unworthy of recognition. Although Heywire's facilitators uphold the competition and annual Heywire Regional Youth Summit as the most interesting and valuable aspects of the project, textual analysis and narrative theory have helped highlight both the potential value and profound limitations of Heywire as a platform that invites rural and regional young people to share stories about their lives.

Narrative theory and textual analysis have illuminated the ways in which Heywire occasions particular kinds of self-representations and voice. While a variety of other mediated platforms can be used for self-expression and self-representation, Heywire's invitation to rural and regional youth to share narratives about their lives distinguishes it specifically as a platform for narrative identity. The project, by its very nature, engages its participants in sense-making, meaning-making processes, and prompts them to author their identities in response to the world around them. The invitation to narrate impels young people "to take an evaluative stance" towards the conditions of their lives (Davis 2002, 24), to confer meaning on their experiences and craft their identities in the process.

All platforms have precise affordances which both guide and constrain practice to varying degrees (Gillespie in Clark, Couldry, Kosnik, et al. 2014, 1447), and it is clear that Heywire both encourages and privileges specific kinds of narrative self-representation: it prompts young people to claim allegiance to the identity category ‘rural and regional youth’; to position themselves within and assert their belonging to rural communities; to identify and address issues of broader social concern; and it privileges the voices of participants who identify themselves as activists, as insightful, positive and community-oriented young people. Such narratives and identities can serve useful functions for their creators by enabling them to construct belonging, to define their perceptions of themselves and their societies, and affect broader change. That these stories are solicited, invited, is of utmost importance because it suggests to the storyteller that their lives and experiences have a value. It is unlikely these stories would emerge without the promise of listening.

The existence of oppositional narratives and dissident voices on this platform indicates that while participation in Heywire is guided and constrained by the project’s overarching agendas and requirements, these do not always prevent young people from fulfilling their own authorial intentions. Despite its nature as a PSM-managed project and heavily structured platform for narrative, rural and regional youth understand Heywire as a space in which their stories and opinions are welcome. This is evidently one area in which Heywire comes through in its promises and the objectives of the project align with those of the participants. From an alternate view, however, it is clear that Heywire’s need to fulfil certain agendas and meet institutional requirements for a certain style and quality of story can be deeply problematic. When young people’s stories are professionally edited and altered by ABC staff, the storyteller seems to have limited control over their own narrative and self-representation. The co-creation process can also make the storyteller feel that their own authorial intentions were overlooked or disregarded.

A significant limitation of Heywire that has been raised in other chapters and further investigated here is that listening and recognition are unevenly distributed. Oppositional narratives, dissident voices and confessional stories emerge within this project, but they are not always acknowledged. Instead, Heywire privileges the stories and voices that fit within its own framework. That is, it amplifies the narratives that align with the project’s vision for what Heywire stories should sound like and do, and the voices of oppositional and confessional storytellers are inevitably silenced in the process. Although Heywire seeks to facilitate voice for all the young people who live in rural, regional and remote Australia, its nature as a competition means that it is cannot provide all its

participants with a voice that is heard. The all-important counterpart to voice – listening – is too often overlooked. What this means for participants is that the value they may find in sharing their stories via this platform is limited, and their expressions and representations of self are positioned as less worthy of recognition than others. This is one way in which Heywire undermines its own potential to be a platform that effectively provides a window into lives and identities that are not enabled by or visible in other types of media. By privileging the voices of a few, Heywire risks over-simplifying or silencing the diversity of lives and of voices it fundamentally aims to expose.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Participatory approaches to content-creation and distribution are now core practices in the PSM context, signifying these institutions are aligning with a global discourse that emphasises participation by audiences and user-created content as the defining features of contemporary media culture. Through involving cohorts of the public as media makers and storytellers, public service media institutions are demonstrating a more inclusive approach to media production and distribution than has traditionally been displayed within the mainstream media. New media technologies and the patterns of media production and consumption that these facilitate have both enabled and necessitated this shift. By inviting audiences to participate in the creation of media content and tell their own stories, PSM institutions are expanding the range of voices that may be expressed within the public domain. While these potentials exist, the PSM context produces certain complexities that challenge the notion of participation. User-created content such as personal narratives occur at the intersection of institutional agendas and obligations along with the intentions of the participants. This thesis investigates the tensions produced at this intersection.

As a project that seeks to provide young, rural and regional Australians with a platform from which to share self-representational narratives depicting their own lives and experiences, in their own voices, Heywire reflects commitments at the heart of participatory culture. The project strives to enable a diversity of voices and perspectives to emerge and be heard. Yet, the institutional context imposes unavoidable constraints. As a case study, Heywire provides a lens through which to explore the coherence of intentions within a project that depends on audience participation, and the value of such a project for the PSM institution as well as the participants. In the contemporary, highly dynamic media environment, there are some questions to be asked about the usefulness of PSM-managed projects such as Heywire and the rather formalised, contrived form of participation that they facilitate. This thesis finds that participatory projects within PSM enable practices and forms of engagement that are generically different from the sorts of participation facilitated by other media, such as social media. Additionally, Heywire's narrative focus is a distinguishing feature and a key element of the project's usefulness as a platform for regional young people's identity creation, self-representation and voice. However, such positive features and affordances are hindered and often outweighed by structural, political

and philosophical complexities, such as the project's competition and its highly prescriptive nature.

Discussion of Findings

The use of new media technologies as a means to foster audience participation is a key way through which PSM institutions fulfil their public service remit in the contemporary media landscape. In the Australian context, the ABC is currently prioritising digital media services and fulfilling a role as a facilitator of media participation. The ABC has an increasing number of projects and online platforms that invite user-created content and these have shifted its role from that of a broadcaster and content distributor, towards that of a media institution that elicits stories and other content from its audiences. Members of the public are involved as participants in the creation of identities, meanings, and media, encouraged to voice their opinions, and the ABC amplifies their perspectives. This thesis positions the Heywire project at the beginning of this shift. Due to its longevity, this case study has enabled an investigation of the ABC's transition into a more participatory media environment and of the challenges and usefulness of such a shift for the institution. For the ABC, participatory projects offer new means of engaging discrete demographics of its audience, while also producing new challenges in terms of maintaining its integrity. For the public, these projects shift the relevance of the ABC towards that of a media organisation that offers a more inclusive representation of society, while also causing new conflicts of interest as their voices and self-representations are mediated by the ABC.

As a project and online platform that invites self-representational narratives from rural and regional young people, the ABC's Heywire is representative of the more inclusive model of content creation and societal representation that PSM now privileges. By inviting people to represent their own lives and give an account of their experiences, in their own voices, this project encourages young people to participate in the construction of their identities and the representations of lives that circulate in the mainstream media. Heywire also explicitly prompts rural and regional youth to contribute their voices to discussions and debates that affect them, thus supporting this cohort to evaluate the conditions of their lives and position themselves against the issues that impact upon them. Despite the profusion of avenues for self-expression and self-representation provided by new media, Heywire's function as a narrative platform means it facilitates the creation and articulation

of identities that are fundamentally different from other kinds. As a project that enables narrative identity, Heywire encourages its youth participants to organise and confer meaning on their experiences and to claim a position within their societies. As technologies continue to evolve it is unlikely that a project such as this will continually exist in the same form; however, a finding of this research is that, as a project that occasions life stories and provides a platform for sharing them, Heywire facilitates a form of participation that has a value to rural and regional young people.

Each chapter of this thesis has addressed a different part of the research questions, investigating: In what ways do the agendas of the institution intersect to create a genuine platform for participation? And how do participants repurpose PSM-managed platforms in unexpected ways, to produce various outcomes for themselves as well as the institution? Chapter two demonstrated that opportunities for participation in the PSM context necessarily fall short of the notion of participation as equality of power (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 17). While the invitation to participate in the creation and distribution of media content, such as through sharing self-representational narratives via the ABC, might appear to promise more egalitarian relationships between media professionals and their audiences, participation in PSM must always be in a way that serves the interests of the institution. This is a profound limitation and it prompts a wary stance amid suggestions that PSM is contributing to “an intensification of the democratic revolution within the media sphere” (Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali 2013, 288). Drawing from Carpentier’s observation of the BBC’s Video Nation, it is doubtful that PSM-managed projects will cede their participants the degree of ownership or control that might be possible in some community media (Carpentier 2003, 443). Nonetheless, this research finds that projects such as Heywire afford control and ownership in different ways, and they reveal other ways in which PSM’s efforts to engage with and foster participatory culture are meaningful.

Opportunities for participation are constrained by the very nature of the PSM context, with its attendant institutional obligations and conventions. In the case of Heywire, the ABC shapes participation in explicit ways, such as through encouraging and privileging narratives that have an uplifting tone, that follow a narrative arc, that construct the storyteller as a community-minded, insightful, positive young person who can contribute constructively to his or her community. Clearly, there are some questions to be asked about the extent to which a project such as this can be thought of as effectively participatory. If the capacity for individual expression and self-representation is significantly hampered by

the structures imposed by the platform, can such platforms be celebrated for granting more power and control to participants?

While projects such as Heywire are not an example of “full participation” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013) they are significant because they represent a vital shift within the mainstream media. Projects such as Heywire mean that representations of society and constructions of identity disseminated through the mainstream media need no longer be limited to constructions created by journalists and media professionals; by facilitating participation, a greater diversity of voices and perspectives can emerge. As Meadows has argued, via digital storytelling “the voice of the people” can be captured and heard (Meadows 2003, 191). Likewise, Couldry finds that “[d]igital storytelling vastly extends the number of people who, at least in principle, can be registered as contributing to the public sphere” (Couldry 2008, 386-387). Narrative as a means of participation and voice remains equally significant now.

While audience participation and projects such as Heywire are now a central part of the PSM remit, such projects are most likely more important to the facilitating institution than they are to their participants. The case study Heywire highlights that while participatory projects may effectively enable people to express their views and share their stories, facilitating recognition is both a challenge and a limitation. Heywire promises its participants ‘voice’ and yet its failure to recognise the majority of their personal expressions means that, for the young storytellers, the project is more likely to represent a missed opportunity for acknowledgement rather than an avenue for meaningful participation. Likewise, Heywire encompasses a number of unrealised potentials for the ABC. As suggested in chapter three, one site in which Heywire overlooks its potential is the competition, the selective nature of which undermines the project’s capacity to be an inclusive platform for voice.

It is possible that the competition aspect of Heywire is equally problematic for Heywire winners. Through privileging the voices of a few and emphasising the competition and the Regional Youth Summit as the most worthy parts of Heywire, the project imposes a burden of representation on its participants and risks devaluing or overlooking the unique, singular experiences and the very diversity of lives represented in young people’s stories. This is potentially problematic for the continued sustainability of Heywire. In a participatory media landscape where people are increasingly representing their lives and expressing their views online, a project that continues to promote only the voices of a select few may seem

outdated. While principles at the heart of Heywire echo the commitments of participation, the competition aspect is a counter to its potential in this area.

Investigating Heywire on structural and organisational levels raises questions about how effectively a project such as this can support rural and regional youth to realise their own intentions for sharing narratives. As the project seeks to fulfil its multiple objectives and align with larger institutional and Governmental objectives, it seems likely that the authorial aims of the youth participants would be overlooked. The interviews with Heywire's youth participants discussed in chapter four supported the findings that Heywire is a project and platform of competing agendas. However, these interviews also revealed that this is not always problematic for the participants. In spite of Heywire's myriad tensions and highly prescriptive nature, young people can still use the platform to their own ends. For example, for Jack and Beth, Heywire was useful as an opportunity and 'safe space' for representing and expressing oneself authentically. Although Heywire upholds the Summit and the opportunity to "make a difference" as its most meaningful aspect, young people's accounts of their participation revealed they frequently created their own meanings and found the platform valuable in ways outside of those intended by the institution. This finding reveals one of the discrepancies within Heywire: the project is not always aware of the ways it is being used or is useful to rural and regional youth.

The interviews further confirmed observations made in chapter two about the ways in which Heywire is unique from other mediated platforms for self-representation and self-expression. The interviewees indicated that part of Heywire's appeal was that it specifically invited their stories, their opinions, and their self-representations, which suggested to participants that their stories and voices were important, and that, via Heywire, they would be heard. As Tamara reported of her participation, "I just thought it was a great opportunity for me to voice my opinion, and I find sometimes that you feel as though you can't, and so this was a good outlet" (interview, February 2013). Similarly, Jack stated "I just sort of saw it [Heywire] as my opportunity to get heard and seen for who I am" (interview, December 2013). For these participants, Heywire provided a rare, legitimate opportunity for voicing and representing oneself in ways that were personally meaningful. Such reports are indicative of Heywire's value to its youth participants and also of its success in facilitating the emergence of identities and voices that may not otherwise be expressed. As narrative self-representations and expressions, the youth voices that Heywire captures could not be articulated in the context of other mediated spaces for identity and voice.

The interviewees' accounts of their participation made clear that Heywire stories emerge at the intersection of various intentions and expectations, including the agendas of the ABC, the personal aims of the storytellers, and, quite often, the hopes and objectives of educators and family members. Through textual analysis of Heywire narratives, chapter five revealed some precise ways in which the agendas of Heywire intersect with those of youth in productive ways, as well as in ways that are potentially destructive. In some instances, the authorial aims of the participant aligned with the intentions of Heywire, resulting in the construction of a narrative identity that fulfilled the expectations of Heywire, while also serving a personal purpose for the storyteller. In the case of Kayla, this was the construction of belonging, while Tamara's narrative identity enabled her to express her desire for change. At other times, the project's clear needs for young people's stories to be well-structured, audio-visual narratives that offer a positive message and have closure is highly problematic.

The identification of three main types of Heywire narrative highlighted that the project both facilitates and favours specific kinds of narrative self-representation, often to the exclusion or dismissal of other kinds. The educative, celebratory and confessional categories helped show that Heywire represents a highly prescriptive model of participation and self-representation, and that this model can be both useful and limiting. The competition privileges educative and celebratory narratives such as Tamara's and Kayla's and, for these storytellers, the project can usefully facilitate a voice that is heard. Despite Heywire's encouragement and preference for these types of stories, the emergence of "oppositional" narratives and "dissident voices" (Davis 2002, 25), along with confessional stories, reveals that youth often use this platform in ways not envisaged by the ABC, creating their own meanings and fulfilling their personal intentions for storytelling. Such narratives suggest that in the minds of its youth participants, Heywire can function as a 'safe', welcoming, and non-judgemental space for representing one's life and expressing one's views. The project appears to neither recognise nor embrace such possibilities, though. Confessional stories and oppositional narratives rarely receive recognition or acknowledgment, and the benefits of Heywire for these storytellers are likely minimal. Through failing to acknowledge dissident voices such as Claire's or confessional storytellers such as Lucy, Heywire not only under-delivers on its promise to "give voice" but risks positioning these stories as inferior or as less worthy of being heard than others.

In Heywire, the opportunity to participate through creating and sharing personal stories via the PSM seems to promise an alternative to constructions of identity and

depictions of society delivered through the mainstream media. An analysis of the various types of narratives visible on the Heywire website reveals that this project does indeed have the potential to illuminate lives, identities, experiences and entire ways of being that are different from those traditionally given voice in the mainstream media. However, Heywire's structure as a competition means that the project's potential in this area is not always fulfilled. By privileging the voices of a few, Heywire seems to over-simplify the diversity of the experiences, opinions and ideas that it originally intended to reveal.

As the ABC continues to emphasise audience participation and "ordinary" stories as part of its contemporary remit, the Heywire project could seek to further fulfil its potential to capture and acknowledge a greater variety of youth voices. One of the failings of Heywire in its current form is that a great many of the experiences, lives and identities it captures go unnoticed on the website, seemingly silenced by the very nature of the project. A recommendation emerging from this research is that the Heywire project should shift some of its focus from the competition and endeavour to acknowledge the narrative self-representations of all its participants, rather than those of the competition winners only. One way through which the project could distribute listening and acknowledgment more evenly is by broadcasting the stories of non-winners on ABC Local Radio, alongside those of the competition winners. The project's potential to illuminate and provide recognition for a diversity of lives could in this way be enhanced. Heywire has been sustained by the hundreds of storytellers who have shared their anecdotes, ideas and concerns via this project over the past 18 years, and extending recognition to more of these participants would extend the project's value.

Implications

Heywire is an example of some of the exciting possibilities that public service media might contribute to the contemporary media sphere, but also of the missed opportunities of participatory practices within PSM. Institutions such as the ABC are uniquely placed to contribute to the advancement of participatory culture. Various obligations that are traditional parts of the public service remit lend to the ideals of participatory culture and the more inclusive practices of content creation and distribution evidenced in projects such as Heywire, ABC Pool, Video Nation and Capture Wales. As Enli argues, "[t]he increased focus on participation in policy and practice can be seen as an adaptation of classic PSM

ideals of public access and audience participation, as well as an expression of adjustment to societal and technological changes” (Enli 2008, 117). Furthermore, the integration of digital media and the objective to “connect” its audiences offers the promise of re-legitimising the role of public service broadcasters in the contemporary media landscape (Debrett 2014, 2). In the Australian context, the ABC’s Charter obligations specify a commitment to representing the diversity of the society it serves and to provide digital media services (“Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983” 2013, 5); further, the ABC is committed to providing its audiences with opportunities to interact with each other and with the ABC (ABC 2010, 3). It also has an additional, specific commitment to provide its rural and regional audiences with “a vehicle for discussion and debate” (ABC 2000, 3). New technologies and the new models of audience engagement and participation that these have enabled mean that the ABC has been able to extend its capabilities in these areas.

The obligations to represent diversity, to provide digital media services and a vehicle for discussion and interaction align with the ideals of participatory culture, the goal of which is to “provide a space where core societal debates can be conducted under terms which ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives are heard” (Jenkins and Carpentier 2013, 19). The ABC’s capacity to experiment (Burns in Cunningham and Turnbull 2014, 329) with new distribution platforms and modes of audience engagement, and its “distinctive innovation role” (Hutchinson 2013, 289), means it achieves this in diverse ways. For example, in projects such as Heywire and ABC Open the institution engages its publics as participants in the shaping of meanings, cultures and identities, and provides platforms from which to capture and promote their voices. The integrity of PSM institutions and their reputation as respected, trustworthy media organisations mean that they can legitimise “ordinary voices” and amplify them within the public sphere in ways that cannot be achieved through other media.

Along with these possibilities, some of the acute challenges imposed by the PSM context include the expectation that the voices and viewpoints of participants will align with the obligations and ideologies of the PSM institution. As a result, and as evidenced in Heywire, these institutions’ processes of engaging and involving cohorts of the audience can be highly prescriptive. While projects such as Heywire endeavour to engage and amplify new, previously unheard voices, the numerous parameters that dictate what can be said and who can be heard contradict the notion of participation and are antithetical to the ideals of participatory culture. The case study Heywire illuminates how a rigid and restrictive model of participation can be problematic for participants as well as PSM. For

instance, participatory projects that are very prescriptive have a limited capacity to effectively support participants to express identities of their own construction, and to have these acknowledged by others. For many participants, projects such as Heywire may seem to only half fulfil their promise of voice and self-representation. For the inviting institution, such projects do not entirely fulfil their potential to reflect the multiplicity of experiences and voices within the societies they represent.

Participatory processes are now embedded within the remit of PSM institutions; however, projects such as Heywire suggest a great deal of institutional ambivalence about how to facilitate participation effectively, and how to manage the personal narratives and media content of the public. When the ABC initiated Heywire in 1998, a competition may have seemed a logical and effective way of engaging regional youth and encouraging them to share their stories via the ABC. As a competition, Heywire represents an ‘eisteddfod model’ (Hartley 2009) of facilitating storytelling that ensures quality in the narratives that are shared. For Hartley (2009), such a model has various benefits: competitions, festivals, and institutionally-facilitated digital storytelling projects provide an opportunity and a context for participating, and also for skills development (Hartley 2009, 32-33). Eisteddfods are often a motivation for amateurs to display their creative talents, and for audiences to engage with them. However, this thesis has revealed various shortcomings of such a model and discussed the problems caused by the exclusivity of a competition. For a project such as Heywire, a competition is more problematic than productive. It does not function as strong motivation for youth participation, and while it may achieve the amplification of some new voices and ‘good stories’, it does so only by silencing or misrecognising numerous other narrative expressions.

The competition model may be useful in the PSM context because it helps ensure a certain level of quality and enables the institution to facilitate participation in a way that is in keeping with its conventions and agendas. However, opportunities for participation need to be less prescriptive and less exclusive if they are to be truly useful to participants, and enable the diversification of voices and meanings within PSM. Fully embracing the potentials of participatory processes and recognising a greater multiplicity of voices and viewpoints would require a paradigmatic shift within these institutions. Such a shift would result in far messier participatory processes and the dissemination of user-created content that is less polished than winning Heywire stories, and less professional than the media content published through ABC Open. Since PSM institutions must maintain their

reputation as trusted, authoritative figures that deliver quality entertainment and information, such a shift may not be possible.

In spite of the shortcomings of participation in the PSM context, the move to engage cohorts of the audience as storytellers and content creators is an important one for these institutions as well as their audiences. One of the successes of audience participation within PSM is that it increases the number of voices and viewpoints that may be articulated within the public sphere, thus contributing to more nuanced and meaningful representations of society. Furthermore, although the modes of participation facilitated by PSM can be highly prescriptive, they can still provide avenues for forms of self-representation and self-expression that might not otherwise occur, and can hence still be useful to participants. This investigation of Heywire, as an instance of audience participation within the ABC, finds that such projects are likely to encompass significant shortcomings along with meaningful opportunities. As PSM continues to evolve within a dynamic media environment, capturing the stories and voices of its public will remain a crucial and worthwhile endeavour, though one inevitably fraught with challenges as the intentions of participants and institutions intersect.

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Appendix 1

Government Funding

The Department of Agriculture's function is to "develop and implement policies and programs that ensure Australia's agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry industries remain competitive, profitable and sustainable" ("The Department of Agriculture: About us" 2015). Evidently, many young people who contribute stories to Heywire are from farms, properties, or are in some way involved in or associated with an agricultural industry. Their narratives depict day to day experiences of farm or property life and often deliberately or inadvertently reveal an issue or concern that is specific to people involved in agriculture. The Department of Agriculture's role in agricultural policy-making and supporting a sustainable future for Australia's primary producers explains its interest in and support of Heywire, and the opinions and concerns of young people who are potentially Australia's future farmers. In July 2012 the Department of Agriculture announced it would fund Heywire for the next three years – through to the 2014 competition round and the February 2015 Summit ("Gillard Government supports ABC's Heywire Competition" 2012).

The Department of Agriculture's website provides some brief information about Heywire under a section entitled *Young people in primary industries*. This section of the website aims "to enable young people from rural, regional and remote Australia to access information about issues that may affect them" and includes hyperlinks to pages that provide information pertaining to Government grants and financial assistance available to assist young people who are involved in, or who intend to enter the primary industries (DAFF 2012). This website describes Heywire as "a space" for voice and a competition, the winners of which have the opportunity to attend the Summit in Canberra:

These winners attend an all-expenses-paid trip to the Heywire Youth Issues Forum in Canberra each year where they will have a chance to visit parliament, meet their federal and local members and talk about life in rural and regional Australia (DAFF 2012).

Obviously, the Department of Agriculture's interest in Heywire and hopes for what it will achieve centre on the wellbeing and sustainability of an industry, and the development of policies. As such, there is an expectation on a Governmental level that Heywire narratives will shed light on issues that affect agricultural industries and guide future development of support agencies for people in the industry, as well as policies.

The support Heywire receives from other Federal departments – including those of Health, Social Services, Infrastructure and Regional Development, and Education and Training – is less easy to rationalise than it is for RIRDC and the Department of Agriculture. While the latter two Departments appear to be quite overt sponsors – in that they describe or discuss Heywire in many Government documents and have a strong physical presence at the Summit – the reason the former three Departments invest in Heywire, and their understanding of the project, are less obvious. The Departments of Health, Education and Training, and of Infrastructure and Regional Development also have a specific commitment to rural Australians; for instance, the category ‘Rural Health’ is a separate section on the Department of Health’s website and “ABC Heywire – giving regional youth a voice” is referred to on as a “Rural Media organisation” (“Rural Health Resources” 2014). It seems logical to deduce that this Department and others may support Heywire because it is a means through which they can demonstrate they are providing support to rural and regional Australians.

Appendix 2

Process of recruiting interviewees

In order to contact non-winners, I chose a number of stories from the Heywire website and emailed a list of these and the Heywire username of the young people who had created them to Heywire staff, who then sent an email on my behalf inviting these young people to participate in my research. I specifically chose stories that demonstrated an unusual use of the Heywire website, or that contrasted with the style of story that the Heywire project favours. Storytellers who had used the website more than once and shared multiple videos, text stories, or photographs demonstrate an unusual use of the website; stories which portray rural or regional life negatively, or lack clear purpose or closure are the types of narratives that contrast with the well-structured, 'good story' that is preferred in the Heywire project. Of the 14 people who were emailed, four responded indicating they would be happy to participate in an interview, but of these, one responded to my follow-up emails, in which I supplied a participant information sheet, consent form, and suggested we arrange a suitable interview date and time.

As a second approach to recruiting participants, I contacted ABC Capricornia – a regional ABC Radio station – and asked for their assistance in putting me in touch with people who had entered the Heywire competition in that region. Each ABC regional station judges the Heywire competition entries that were submitted in that region; as such, it seemed logical to contact one of these regional stations directly. I assumed they would be able to help me find competition entrants who I could then interview. Most importantly, I hoped to find interviewees who had shared stories on the Heywire website but who had not been selected as competition winners or attended the Summit. These young people would have a vastly different experience of Heywire than the 35-40 who had co-created their stories with ABC staff, and journeyed to Canberra to participate in the Summit, in ABC Radio interviews, and present their ideas and opinions at Parliament House. While ABC Capricornia responded to my email with a phone call and stated they were very eager to help with my research, they were only able to provide me with the details of the region's winner. ABC Capricornia forwarded my request onto their Rural department in case they were able to help me locate other Heywire entrants; unfortunately, though, Rural never responded.

There are a number of likely reasons it has been so difficult to locate non-winners. Firstly, the ABC does not always receive the full contact details of everyone who uploads stories on the Heywire website. Until July 2014, sharing stories on the Heywire website required a username, password and email address. The ABC also requested storytellers supply their dates of birth and postal addresses so that ABC staff could determine which region the story entry corresponded to. As described in chapter two, one Heywire winner is selected from each ABC regional station¹⁸; the entrant's address and postcode are therefore important details for the competition. If insufficient details were supplied, Heywire producers endeavour to contact the storyteller and ask them to supply their address, or at least a postcode, so they could be entered into the competition properly¹⁹. If the storyteller failed to provide these details, their narratives could not be judged. No doubt this was a flawed system for keeping track of Heywire storytellers. It meant that ABC stations did not always have a comprehensive list of who their region's Heywire storytellers were, nor these storytellers' contact details. This is possibly one reason ABC Capricornia was unable to help me make contact with non-winning Heywire storytellers. From July 14th 2014, the Heywire website provides a step by step guide that assists young people to upload stories, and ensures that all the necessary details are provided. It is impossible to upload stories to the website without providing a date of birth, postcode, and email address. One could hope this will prove a better system for monitoring and tracking all Heywire storytellers.

¹⁸ There are 51 regional ABC Local Radio stations, and usually between 35 and 40 young people are selected as Heywire winners. If a region receives few story entries, they may coordinate with another region and select one winner across the two regions.

¹⁹ This is personal knowledge from my experience as a Heywire online producer in 2010.

Appendix 3

Experiences of co-creation

For instance, Evie described that when her text story was selected as the winning Heywire entry in her region, ABC staff contacted her and – with her input and approval along the way – edited her text story into a short script which was recorded as a three minute audio and paired with photographs of her and her family at work on their Spanish Mackerel trawler (interview, December 2013). I spoke to Evie about the editing process:

Interviewer: So I see that the original story that you wrote is a little bit different from the one the ABC produced. Did you make the slideshow of pictures and photographs to go with your story?

Evie: No, no I didn't do that, but I put all the photos together and they [ABC staff] picked what ones they wanted. But no, I put it in [to the competition] as just a 700 word story and they had to cut it down anyway for everyone whether it was an audio, video or story with words, and then they thought they'd have fun with it basically and add audio to it and record it and add photos to it and I've got a LOT of photos (laughs), so they put them in there as well. It was a bit tricky coz of my lack of internet, but I got it there and they actually did a really good job with it in the end, and with all the sound effects and everything. It was quite hilarious. I don't know how many times, but Dad's shown that to people and they think the audio and the slideshow is pretty amazing. People go "oh thank goodness someone's sharing, like, these stories!" Or something, and "Oh I'm so proud of you!" And I barely know some of these people, but, you know, it's actually really cool to have that to show people as well instead of them just reading it. It's a little bit different but I got the final edit so it's not like they changed it completely.

Interviewer: So you mean you got to approve it or say that you liked it before they actually published it?

Evie: Yeah, well, it went backwards and forwards a couple of times [via email] with the writing and then with the photos. A couple of the photos they'd taken off my Facebook page and I said "no that doesn't have any relevance to what I'm saying!" (Laughs) So I explained it a bit and put it back and they changed it a bit, so yeah, I'm quite happy with the end result. I basically said "no yeah, that's good, I really like that and everyone here really likes that." They didn't post it up on the website or anything until they had my approval basically.

While Evie's story was originally a text story accompanied by one photograph, it is now a digital story in the traditional sense – a series of personal photographs accompanied by a voiceover. A sea shanty plays in the background at various intervals, and Evie's images of ships and the sea are paired with sound effects of crashing waves.

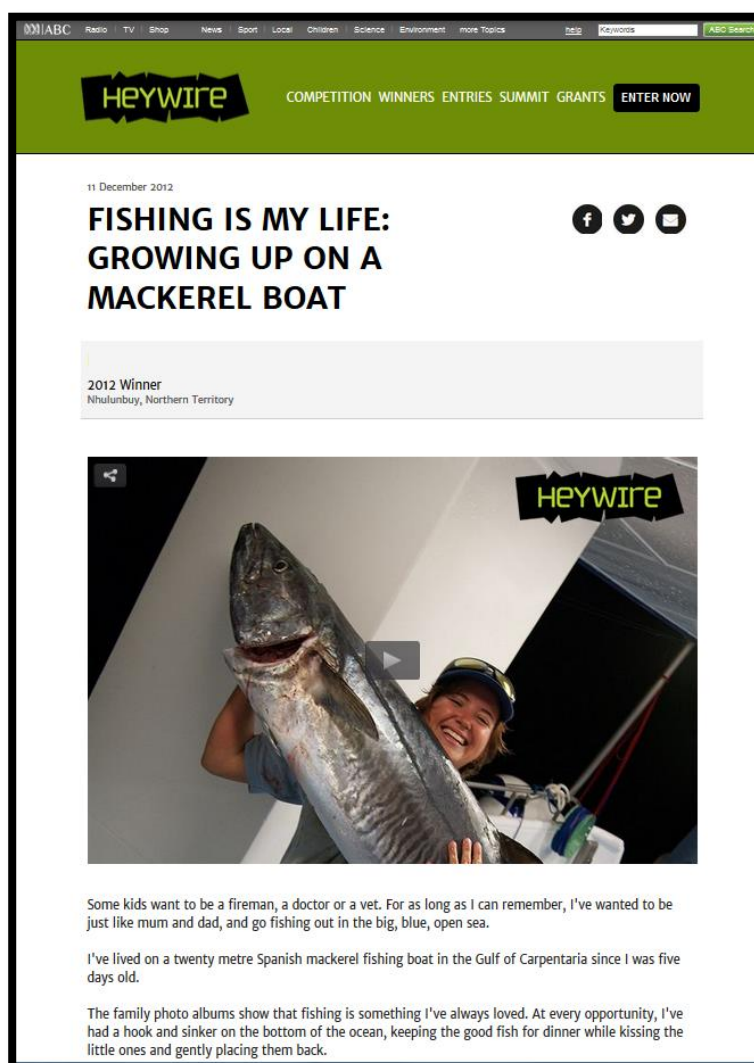


Figure 20: Evie's professionally produced Heywire story.

Understanding Evie's professionally produced Heywire story as co-created helpfully acknowledges the role and influence of the ABC and the expertise of the staff members who worked with her. As in digital storytelling, producing Heywire stories for broadcast involves collaboration between ABC staff and young people, the aims of which are to facilitate self-representation, and give young people a voice that is heard through assisting in the production of well-crafted, engaging audio-visual stories.